

ENCOURAGING BLACK WOMEN TO EMBRACE THEIR LEGACY OF
PROPHETIC ACTIVISM THROUGH SHARING THE FAITH
STORIES OF PROPHETIC WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

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The horrendous mistreatment of Black men during the Emancipation and Reconstruction eras increased community activism in the lives of Black women. Often left to support their families in times of crisis and address critical social needs, Black women used their circumstances to become prophetic activists, challenging government systems within their communities. Although Black women have come a long way, there is still a great need for their work to be supported. This project explores how sharing faith stories of prophetic women can encourage Black women to see themselves as prophetic activists, thus allowing them to make changes in their communities.

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I thank God for Her tender mercies in calling me to the critical work of Prophetic Activism. I will continue to live, move, and have my being in You (Acts 17:28).

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Thank you to my oldest son, Jeysonlee Scott, who was the catalyst to me becoming a Prophetic Activist even before I had the words or knowledge to apply to it. Our scholarly hardships together as you pursued your Master of Divinity degree while I pursued the Doctor of Ministry degree helped me get the work done. Thank you, Brendan Earl, my youngest, for the neck massages at my most tense moments and for always reading me and knowing when I needed a hug. Our conversations on God, Christology,

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I am grateful to the ministries and organizations participating in this study: Valley Stream Presbyterian Church, Community Healing and Caring Center (The W.A.N.T.E.D. Project), and Restored Life Group, who supplied the nineteen beautiful Black women who participated in this project. You did not have to dedicate six weeks to this project over the summer months, but you did. You listened and shared your stories and yourselves in this process. I have learned so much from you. Your stories inspired me and “make” me a better Prophetic Activist. I pray that this project has done the same for you. From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the memory of my grandmothers – Artimease Morgan Jefferson and Juanita Pugh Clemons – who were the first women I would see as Prophetic Activists. Their community involvement and the mothering of their children and other biological and non-biological children inspired me to write on this subject. I dedicate my work to my grandmothers, mothers, “other mothers,” and Black women who, like Rizpah and Ida B. Wells-Barnett, had to swat away the vultures of patriarchy, misogyny, racism, and genderism to “make a way out of no way” and ultimately contribute to the lives of countless others.

ABBREVIATIONS

BIPOC	Black, Indigenous, People of Color
BFT	Black Feminist Thought
CA	Context Associate
CST	Critical Social Theory
DH	Deuteronomic History
DV	Domestic Violence
FT	Feminist Theory
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
P	Participant
PA	Prophetic Activism
RLG	The Restored Life Group
TWP	The WANTED Project
UTS	Union Theological Seminary
VT	Vicarious Traumatization
WANTED	Worthy, Accountable, Named, Thankful, Empowered, Determined
WT	Womanist Theology

You are a seed that is being watered and will produce good fruit and beautiful blossoms. You are the millions of premature babies who grow to live and become successful. You are small thoughts that turn into great inventions. You are the poverty-stricken souls who, through the grace of God, find nourishment. You are the abused who go on to save the abused. You are the hungry who go on to feed the hungry and drug-addicted who go on to save the drug-addicted. Sister girl, you are a giant in Christ Jesus!

—Kymberley Clemons-Jones, *Cured But Not Healed: How to Experience Deeper Faith on Your Journey with God*

INTRODUCTION

This project has been a confluence of everything I love about learning and teaching. I have always been drawn to stories of those in history who have achieved greatness during challenging circumstances. My grandmother's stories have always been a beacon of light as I tried to find my way through my life's journey. Throughout this project, I have worked my way through the aspects of my life that were most transformative: the lives of God, Black women, their children, shared struggles, faith stories, community, and activism, and somehow through the power of the Holy Spirit, this project, "Encouraging Black Women to Embrace Their Legacy of Prophetic Activism through the Sharing of Faith Stories," was birthed.

This project is important because Black women experience racial and gender discrimination daily. Because of bias, Black women's creativity and prophetic activism within their communities are taken for granted and often undermined when the need for growth is necessary. Patriarchy and misogyny are why Black women need support in understanding the gifts their foremothers have left them to be able to make sustainable change and to grow their ideas to help communities in need. This project aims to encourage Black women to embrace their legacy of prophetic activism, defined by the four-part definition proposed by Deidria H. Jordan and Camille M. Wilson.

Black church becomes politically active, reaching beyond its congregation, when (a) the church leader is interested in involving the church in community issues, (b) the church itself is not restricted from having a presence in community matters

(e.g., church by-laws), (c) the church members are receptive to the idea of having the church involved in community affairs, and (d) the current social climate both necessitates and allows church involvement.¹

This project comes from a Black church and its collaborations and partnerships with community organizations seeking to help Black communities. “Prophetic activism can result in community transformation partnerships through culturally based church programming that builds leadership capacity for the residents of both communities to address issues and change outcomes.”² The stories of faith overcoming hardships are Christian-based and inspired by the legacy of the Black Church’s platform of community outreach and social activism.

Chapter One, Ministry Focus, outlines my process of spiritual discernment that led to this final project. The location for my project was Valley Stream, New York, and the surrounding areas. I invited Black women from Valley Stream Presbyterian Church (VSPC), where I pastor, my non-profit organization, The WANTED Project (TWP), and my Coaching Practice, the Restored Life Group (RLG), to participate. It was essential to have women from different backgrounds, churched and non-churched, participate in the study; therefore, I thought it necessary to include women from various groups, not just the church. This section provides context information on VSPC, TWP, and RLG, racial and ethnic, educational, juvenile justice, and socioeconomic demographics in Valley Stream, New York. Additionally, this section will outline the four developmental stages

¹ Diedria H. Jordan and Camille M. Wilson, “Supporting African American Student Success Through Prophetic Activism: New Possibilities for Public School-Church Partnerships,” *Urban Education* 52, no. 1 (2017): 91-119.

² Danny Anthony Everett, “Prophetic Activism: Increasing the Academic Achievement among Low Performing African-American Male Students at Mary B. Martin School,” (Dmin. Thesis, United Theological Seminary, 2020), 20.

that have influenced my ministerial journey: childhood, teenage, educational, and professional development.

Chapter Two, Biblical Foundations, explores the text of Rizpah and her sons and the importance of Rizpah's sacrifice, not only for two of her biological sons but also for her "sister" Merab's five sons. Most, if not all, Bibles would refer to this text in 2 Samuel 21:1-14 as Samuel or David's text, but Rizpah's story holds more power to me. In this section, you will find a historical analysis of 1 and 2 Samuel, a literary analysis of 2 Samuel, a social/cultural analysis of 2 Samuel, a major themes section, and a word study of 2 Samuel.

Chapter Three, Historical Foundations, explores the life of Ms. Ida B. Wells-Barnett from her parents' youth until Wells-Barnett died in 1931. The history of Wells-Barnett's life and how the Emancipation and Reconstruction eras influenced her is central to this chapter and to understanding her prophetic activism. Additionally, Wells-Barnett's educational and family life, her life as a journalist, and the Curve Lynchings, which was the catalyst for her work as an anti-lynching crusader, are chronicled in this chapter. The lynchings of her three friends motivated Wells-Barnett's anti-lynching work, leading her to be internationally renowned for her work in anti-lynching.

Chapter Four, Theological Foundations, surveys Womanist Theology (WT) and its importance to Black women in academia and the community. Womanist Theology was birthed out of Black women's experiences and supported the work of academicians; however, this chapter will also explore what WT means to everyday Black women within our communities. Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mothers Garden: Womanist Prose*, Stacey Floyd-Thomas' *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism In Religion and Society*, and

Kimberley P. Johnson's *The Womanist Preacher: Proclaiming Womanist Rhetoric from the Pulpit* are explored helping the reader to understand that WT can be shared and readily understood and uplifted by Black women everywhere. Floyd-Thomas' four-part definition of Womanist Theology, Radical Subjectivity, Traditional Communalism, Redemptive Self-love, and Critical Engagement is discussed in detail. Also addressed are theodicy, theological relevance, and engagement of WT.

Chapter Five, Interdisciplinary Foundations, focuses on the importance of the intersectionality of this project with Feminist Theory (FT), Black Womanist Thought (BWT), and Critical Social Theory (CST). The intersectionality of FT through BFT offers a theory and framework for Black women's resistance that manifests into community activism, whereas CST is its foundation. Many prophetic activists have developed because of the mothering efforts of Black women. The concepts of "othermothers," "women-centered networks," "fictive kin" networks, and "resistant knowledge traditions" are explored in chapter five.

Chapter Six, the final chapter, is the Project Analysis, which analyzes all the data collected during the six-week research project with nineteen Black women between the ages of twenty-seven and sixty-five who considered themselves mothers or "othermothers." The following sections are addressed in this section: 1) Methodology, which includes the tools of research used to complete the project and verbatim excerpt transcripts of the group discussions; 2) Implementation includes the structure and outline of the six-week project, stakeholder descriptions, and criteria for participant involvement; 3) A Summary of Learning contains the expectations of the project and charts revealing further evidence of meeting the expectations of the hypothesis; and 4) the Conclusion

which addresses what I would done in retrospect and next steps for further research on this topic.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Introduction

Much of my ministry has revolved around Black women and their children's needs. In my ministry context at the Valley Stream Presbyterian Church (VSPC), most members are Black women, many of whom are parents to youth. Likewise, the same is true of the participants of the Worthy, Accountable, Named, Thankful, Empowered, Determined program, otherwise known as the WANTED Project (TWP). The membership of young boys of color is heavily supported by Black women. My educational experience of obtaining a degree in Social Work and a degree in Counseling also lends itself to working with Black women and their children.

Additionally, my work with Black women through my coaching practice, Restored Life Group, helps address their emotional and spiritual needs through a coaching platform. I have a bi-vocational ministry, and I am an entrepreneur. The stories that have inspired me since childhood have helped me become a prophetic activist to help in the healing process of my clients and community.

I will address women of color as mothers to at-risk children in this chapter as well as offer demographics for the ministry context of Nassau County and the Valley Stream area. The children are at risk precisely because of the ills of the social construct of

racism. Racism affects not only the youth but also leaves Black mothers in impossible positions as they try to protect their children from societal harm. The tenacity and faith it takes for mothers to raise children who have or will ultimately face discrimination based on their skin color or socio-economic status is extraordinary. Likewise, raising at-risk youth takes courage, faith, and an activist spirit to meet the needs of youth in a color-conscious world.

The population affecting the context of this project is Black and Hispanic/Latino/a women and their children. For the purpose of this project, the following will describe the various definitions of Race:

- **White:** A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa.
- **Black or African American:** A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa.
- **American Indian or Alaska Native:** A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America) and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment.
- **Asian:** A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam.
- **Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander:** A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.¹
- **Hispanic or Latino:** refers to a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race. This category includes people who reported detailed Hispanic or Latino groups such as: Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican Republic, Costa Rican, Guatemalan, Honduran, Nicaraguan, Panamanian, Salvadoran, Argentinian, Bolivian, Chilean, Colombian, Ecuadorian, Paraguayan, Peruvian, Uruguayan, Venezuelan, and other Central and South Americans.²

¹ US Census Bureau, “Quick Facts Nassau County,” <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/data/shboard/nassaucountynewyork/RHI225219>.

² US Census Bureau, “Hispanic or Latino Origin,” <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/note/US/RHI725219#:~:text=for%20racial%20categories>.

Stories and storytelling have become essential to my ministry work. I suspect it is also vital to other Black women who gain inspiration from the stories of women overcoming adversity. In addition, I believe women in Community sharing stories of faith and adversity lead to creativity and innovations that bring healing to families and communities.

Context

Primary Ministry Station

Valley Stream Presbyterian Church is a church of the Presbytery of Long Island in Nassau County, New York, which falls within the Presbyterian Church United States of America (PCUSA).³ The Presbyterian Church was established in 1630 by French Reformer John Calvin, and The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUSA) was established in 1788.⁴ VSPC is located at the corner of West Jamaica and Central Avenues at 130 South Central Avenue. It is in the Incorporated Village of Valley Stream. Central Avenue is the main thoroughfare that intersects many other main streets, such as Sunrise Highway, Merrick Blvd, and the Southern State Parkway. The location is one block from Sunrise Highway and the Long Island Railroad tracks, a very accessible area. In addition, VSPC sits across the street from the Village Hall and the Henry Waldinger Library and is less than one mile from Green Acres Mall and Commons.

³ The Presbytery of Long Island, “Churches,” <https://www.presbyteryofli.com/churches/>.

⁴ Presbyterian Historical Society, National Archives of the PC(USA), “History of the Church,” <https://www.history.pcusa.org/history-online/presbyterian-history/history-church>.

In 2008, VSPC had twenty-seven members on the membership roll. Currently, VSPC has 106 members. The pastor from 1984 to 2008 came out of retirement to pastor VSPC half-time. Upon his retirement, he urged the Church's leadership to find a pastor who was a person of color because the demographics of the church and the Valley Stream community had significantly changed with more people of color moving into the area.

The racial/ethnic demographic makeup of VSPC as of November 2020 was 92.5% Black, 2.8% White, 2.8% Asian, and 1.9% Hispanic/Latino/a.⁵ When I came to pastor the church in 2008, the demographics were 74.1% Black, 18.5% White, and 7.4% Asian.⁶ Ethnic demographics for Black persons are as follows: eleven Africans (Ghana and Nigeria), fifteen African-Americans, and seventy-two Caribbean-Americans (Jamaica, Grenada, Barbados, Guyana, and Trinidad).⁷ TWP's racial demographics from 2011 to 2020 are 70% Black and 30% Hispanic, with most members living in Valley Stream and attending one of the three high schools. There are five other Presbyterian Churches within a three-mile radius of VSPC.⁸

During my tenure, the emphasis at VSPC has been to engage the community believing the Church is more than the building. Because of this, VSPC's ministry has expanded past the regular church meetings. It has become a community space where people with various beliefs meet regularly. The church now includes its surrounding communities and even the world — as ministries in Ghana, Africa, have grown.

⁵ PCUSA, "2019 Statistical Report for Valley Stream Presbyterian Church."

⁶ PCUSA, "2019 Statistical Report for Valley Stream Presbyterian Church."

⁷ PCUSA, "2019 Statistical Report for Valley Stream Presbyterian Church."

⁸ Presbyterian Mission Organization, "Community Demographics for the United States," <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/research-services/demographic-report/>.

TWP was established in May 2011 after five youths attacked my sixteen-year-old son next door to VSPC. TWP runs its programs in the Florence J. Smith Fellowship Hall at VSPC. The program started by helping boys of color to understand that they are not only “wanted” in negative ways, but they are positively “wanted” by their families, friends, and communities. TWP reminds them, and now girls of color, that they are loved, valued, purposeful, and contributing members of society. They are Worthy, Accountable, Named, Thankful, Empowered, and Determined.

In 2016, Ms. Afua Ofori-Atta from Ghana, West Africa, was working in the United States for six months and approached me about my program. She heard about TWP’s work and wanted to take the program to her community in Ghana and run it in the Senior Correctional Facility, a juvenile detention center. I trained her in the curriculum, and now she is the director of TWP-Ghana. Gaining momentum, TWP–Ghana has been running since then and has become a staple of outreach at VSPC and within the community. Since its inception, TWP has had over 250 participants, with approximately 100 participating in the United States and 150 participating in Ghana. TWP-Ghana has so positively influenced the youth that it now mandates all juveniles to complete our program before release.

TWP ran its seven-week program in the spring and just finished another program this fall. These last two programs met online via the Zoom platform because of Covid-19. During this time, TWP began a girls’ group that is still running. TWP is designed to teach boys and girls of color coping strategies for facing potential dangers because of racism and other unjust systems such as poverty and educational inequality. Each class period is

two hours long. The classes run for seven-weeks in the fall and spring. Additionally, monthly stand-alone workshops are held to motivated youth to achieve their goals.

TWP culminates with an “I AM WANTED” celebration. This day celebrates the youth and what they have learned through the program. Certificates and other gifts are given to each participant to celebrate their completion. TWP-Ghana, since Covid-19, has been able to minister to the youth of the detention center remotely. Unfortunately, the center has closed to all visitors; however, TWP has encouraged the boys via letters and special surprises.

Immediate Context

The Village of Valley Stream, located in Nassau County in Long Island, New York, was named in 1852 by its first resident Robert Pagan.⁹ Valley Stream is a city located in New York. The population in the Village of Valley Stream was 37,511 as of the 2010 census.¹⁰ It is the seventeenth-largest city in New York.¹¹ Spanning over three miles, Valley Stream has a population density of 10,775 people per square mile.¹² The

⁹ The Village of Valley Stream, On The Trail of the Rising Sun, “History of Valley Stream,” <https://www.vsvny.org/index.asp?SEC=17E2184D-D1F2-402C-8953-35B0520559EA&DE=87E7EFF1-CB1D-4180-9915-35563AD90F0E>.

¹⁰ Lat-Long.com, “Village of Valley Stream,” https://www.lat-long.com/Latitude-Longitude-2391182-New_York-Village_of_Valley_Stream.html.

¹¹ World Population Review, “Valley Stream, NY Population 2020,” <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/valley-stream-ny-population>.

¹² World Population Review, “Valley Stream, NY Population 2020,” <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/valley-stream-ny-population>.

average household income in Valley Stream is \$118,281, with a poverty rate of 4.43%.¹³

In 2018, Money Magazine touted Valley Stream as the best place to live in New York.¹⁴

Valley Stream is in the southwest part of the Town of Hempstead along the border of Queens, New York. The Village borders the Long Island communities of Elmont, Rockville Centre, Garden City, Lynbrook, Malverne, Franklin Square, Hewlett, Woodmere, and Rosedale, Queens, New York.¹⁵ Most of the surrounding areas are predominantly comprised of BIPOC women and children.

The median income for Valley Stream Households is \$104,773.¹⁶ In recent years, the median rental costs have come to \$1,781 per month, and the median house value is \$403,400.¹⁷ The median age in Valley Stream is 40.5 years, 38.7 years for males and 41.6 years for females.¹⁸ The median income of households in Nassau County is \$116,304.¹⁹ Less than 10% of the Nassau County population makes less than \$10,000, and 16.7%

¹³ World Population Review, “Valley Stream, NY Population 2020,” <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/valley-stream-ny-population>.

¹⁴ Melissa Koenig, “Money Magazine Names Valley Stream the Best Place to Live in New York,” LongIslandHerald.com, January 24, 2018, <https://www.liherald.com/stories/money-magazine-names-valley-stream-best-place-to-live-in-new-york.99489>.

¹⁵ The Long Island Exchange, The Guide to Everything Long Island, “Valley Stream,” <https://www.longislandexchange.com/towns/valley-stream/>.

¹⁶ World Population Review, “Valley Stream, NY Population 2020,” <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/valley-stream-ny-population>.

¹⁷ World Population Review, “Valley Stream, NY Population 2020,” <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/valley-stream-ny-population>.

¹⁸ World Population Review, “Valley Stream, NY Population 2020,” <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/valley-stream-ny-population>.

¹⁹ Data USA: Nassau County, NY, “Wages,” <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/nassau-county-ny#:~:text=Households%20in%20Nassau%20County%2C%20NYrepresents%20a%207.56%25%20annual%20growth>.

earn \$200,000 or more.²⁰ The highest percentage group makes between \$100,000 and \$149,999 at 20.4%.²¹

According to Census Bureau's 2011 to 2015 American Community Survey, Long Island's minority population's estimated size has increased.²² The white population during this period declined, whereas the Asian, Black, and Hispanic numbers also increased.²³ From 2006 to 2015, the population of Nassau County in Valley Stream rose from 1,329,083 to 1,354,612.²⁴ The Hispanic population increased from 13.7% to 15.8%.²⁵ The white population decreased from 67% to 62.9%.²⁶ The black or African-American population increased from 10.5% to 10.9%, and in 2019, that percentage increased to 13.1%.²⁷ The Asian population increased from 7.5% to 8.5%.²⁸

²⁰ US Census Bureau, "Quick Facts Nassau County," <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/dashboard/nassaucountynynewyork/RHI225219>.

²¹ US Census Bureau, "Quick Facts Nassau County," <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/dashboard/nassaucountynynewyork/RHI225219>.

²² US Census Bureau, "Quick Facts Nassau County," <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/dashboard/nassaucountynynewyork/RHI225219>.

²³ US Census Bureau, "Quick Facts Nassau County," <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/dashboard/nassaucountynynewyork/RHI225219>.

²⁴ US Census Bureau, "Quick Facts Nassau County," <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/dashboard/nassaucountynynewyork/RHI225219>.

²⁵ US Census Bureau, "Quick Facts Nassau County," <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/dashboard/nassaucountynynewyork/RHI225219>.

²⁶ US Census Bureau, "Quick Facts Nassau County," <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/dashboard/nassaucountynynewyork/RHI225219>.

²⁷ US Census Bureau, "Quick Facts Nassau County," <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/dashboard/nassaucountynynewyork/RHI225219>.

²⁸ US Census Bureau, "Quick Facts Nassau County," <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/dashboard/nassaucountynynewyork/RHI225219>.

The Nassau County Juvenile Justice Profile report records that 12% of juveniles between seven and fifteen in Nassau County are black males compared to 55% white and 21% Hispanic in 2017.²⁹ The juvenile detention center admitted 48% of Black boys compared to 11% white and 42% Hispanic males in the same age range.³⁰ Out of the same group's probation intakes, 40% are Black males, 26% are white, and 30% are Hispanic.³¹

In 2017, the percentage of family court initial actions for Black males was 42%, and by 2018 it was 48%.³² In comparison, in 2017, white males in the family court were 18% which decreased in 2018 to 15%.³³ Hispanic males were 39% and dropped to 33%.³⁴ Probation violations in 2017 for Black juvenile males were 0%, 20% for white males, and 80% for Hispanic males.³⁵

The Village of Valley Stream is a very diverse and growing community. Just fifty years ago, the city was not like it is today. People of color and various ethnicities are attracted to Valley Stream because of its location, which borders Queens, New York.

²⁹ Division of Juvenile Justice Services, "Nassau County Juvenile Justice Profile Report," <https://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/crimnet/ojsa/jj-reports/nassau.pdf>.

³⁰ Division of Juvenile Justice Services, "Nassau County Juvenile Justice Profile Report," <https://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/crimnet/ojsa/jj-reports/nassau.pdf>.

³¹ Division of Juvenile Justice Services, "Nassau County Juvenile Justice Profile Report," <https://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/crimnet/ojsa/jj-reports/nassau.pdf>.

³² Division of Juvenile Justice Services, "Nassau County Juvenile Justice Profile Report," <https://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/crimnet/ojsa/jj-reports/nassau.pdf>.

³³ Division of Juvenile Justice Services, "Nassau County Juvenile Justice Profile Report," <https://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/crimnet/ojsa/jj-reports/nassau.pdf>.

³⁴ Division of Juvenile Justice Services, "Nassau County Juvenile Justice Profile Report," <https://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/crimnet/ojsa/jj-reports/nassau.pdf>.

³⁵ Division of Juvenile Justice Services, "Nassau County Juvenile Justice Profile Report," <https://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/crimnet/ojsa/jj-reports/nassau.pdf>.

Valley Stream, also known as Valley “Queens,” a derogatory statement by those who fear people of color moving into their neighborhoods, is now a place people of color call home. This ever-changing community is now responsible for keeping up with its diversity. Although the city is very diverse, the various school districts’ teaching staff are predominantly white and do not reflect the students of color. Cultural programs for youths, like the programs being developed within the Valley Stream Community, are needed more than ever to help Black mothers and their children thrive in the Valley Stream community and beyond.

According to the Presbyterian Mission organization of PCUSA, within a one-mile radius of VSPC, the population is 52,406. The number of households with children was 34.4% compared to 27.9% in the U.S., single homes (those without children) were 9.7% compared to a US percentage of 8.9%.³⁶ Educational attainment of adults without a high school diploma was 9.2% and 40.2% with at least a Bachelor’s degree compared with U.S. statistics of 12.3% of adults without high school diplomas and 31.5% of adults with Bachelor’s degrees.³⁷ The demographics of major races in the Valley Stream area compared to the rest of the U.S. are as follows: Asians were 13.9% locally versus 5.4% U.S., Blacks were 33.2% local compared to 12.3% U.S., Hispanics were 27.8% versus 17.8% in the U.S., and for Whites were 27.8% were locally and 61.1% in the U.S.³⁸ All

³⁶ Presbyterian Mission, “Community Demographics – Presbyterian Church USA,” <https://maps.nazarene.org/DemographicsPresbyterian/summary.html?y=4962935.236336926&x=-8205232.018845048&b=1>.

³⁷ Presbyterian Mission, “Community Demographics – Presbyterian Church USA,” <https://maps.nazarene.org/DemographicsPresbyterian/summary.html?y=4962935.236336926&x=-8205232.018845048&b=1>.

³⁸ Presbyterian Mission, “Community Demographics – Presbyterian Church USA,” <https://maps.nazarene.org/DemographicsPresbyterian/summary.html?y=4962935.236336926&x=-8205232.018845048&b=1>.

school enrollment by race in Valley Stream is as follows: 19.2% White, 29.8% Black, 28.7% Hispanic, 21.1% Asian or Pacific Islander, and 1.2% American Indian or Native of Alaska.³⁹

According to the Long Island Herald, in 2017, school officials acknowledged the need for more diverse teaching staff in its schools.⁴⁰

Valley Stream once had a reputation for being a secluded, mostly white, alternative to New York City. Now it known for its diverse population, eighty-nine percent of the Central High School District staff identifies as white, as do 95 percent of District 13's, 95 percent of District 24's and 79 percent of District 30's.⁴¹

The School's Superintendent reported, "Since 2007, the high school district population of white students has dropped by nearly half."⁴² "The student body is 22 percent white, according to the most recent State Education Department of Statistics from 2015-2016."⁴³ According to an April 2017 Institute of Labor Economics study, "Low-income Black students who have at least one Black teacher in elementary school are

³⁹ Neighborhood Scouts, "Valley Stream, NY, Public School Ratings, School Districts in Valley Stream," <https://www.neighborhoodscout.com/ny/valley-stream/schools>.

⁴⁰ Nick Ciccone, "Valley Stream Schools Struggle to Achieve Diversity Among Staff," LIHerald.com, September 20, 2017, <https://www.liherald.com/stories/valley-stream-schools-struggle-to-achieve-diversity-among-staff,95799>.

⁴¹ Nick Ciccone, "Valley Stream Schools Struggle to Achieve Diversity Among Staff," LIHerald.com, <https://www.liherald.com/stories/valley-stream-schools-struggle-to-achieve-diversity-among-staff,95799>.

⁴² Nick Ciccone, "Valley Stream Schools Struggle to Achieve Diversity Among Staff," LIHerald.com, <https://www.liherald.com/stories/valley-stream-schools-struggle-to-achieve-diversity-among-staff,95799>.

⁴³ Nick Ciccone, "Valley Stream Schools Struggle to Achieve Diversity Among Staff," LIHerald.com, <https://www.liherald.com/stories/valley-stream-schools-struggle-to-achieve-diversity-among-staff,95799>.

significantly more likely to graduate from high school and consider attending college.”⁴⁴

The statistics regarding economics in the educational system are as follows: 33.1% are economically disadvantaged, 28.6% are school lunch eligible, and 4.5% are free lunch eligible.⁴⁵

Context of Project

Valley Stream has become a great community for people of color and various ethnicities because it is the closest town outside the New York boroughs of Queens and Brooklyn. As a result, its resident population has increased for people of color, specifically Hispanic and Black people, while the white population has decreased. For the most part, the community tries to live peaceably in its diversity. However, if you were to ask any white person on the local Valley Stream Facebook pages if they considered Valley Stream to be an inclusive town, they would say it is very inclusive.

However, looking at other local community pages, it is obvious to see that there is racial tension. Black and Brown residents, in other conversations, say Valley Stream is extremely exclusive. Black women specifically have much to say about its perceived diversity. Subtle microaggressions from the non-Black community often say, “How much Valley Stream has changed since the early 2000s,” which people of color have interpreted to mean that it has changed for the worse since Black and Brown people have moved into the community. This is indicated by their follow-up conversations which always include

⁴⁴ Nick Ciccone, “Valley Stream Schools Struggle to Achieve Diversity Among Staff,” LIHerald.com, <https://www.liherald.com/stories/valley-stream-schools-struggle-to-achieve-diversity-among-staff.95799>.

⁴⁵ Neighborhood Scouts, “Valley Stream, NY, Public School Ratings, School Districts in Valley Stream,” <https://www.neighborhoodscout.com/ny/valley-stream/schools>.

talking about “Valley Queens,” a nick name for Valley Stream, which borders an area of Queens, New York, where predominantly Black and Brown people reside. With this, many white residents would still say how racially diverse the town is and how Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) should be glad to live in Valley Stream.

In many ways, this disagreement focuses on the high school educational system because most people move to Valley Stream because of the schools. The Valley Stream schools have predominantly white staff and do not reflect the many students of color who attend. Valley Stream is tasked with keeping up with its diversity.

Not only do the schools need teachers of color, but the Valley Stream area also requires cultural programs to help children of color succeed in the Valley Stream community. The data shows that although more white male juveniles between the ages of seven and fifteen are introduced into the juvenile system, more Black and Hispanic males are admitted into juvenile detention centers. Many influences, including a lack of cultural support, low self-esteem, and self-efficacy, could be determinant factors, along with systemic racism, poverty, and educational disparities within the Valley Stream community.

Ministry Journey

Four developmental periods have influenced my ministry journey in a significant way: (1) childhood, (2) teenage years, (3) educational development, and (4) professional development. My experiences as a child with two strong women as role models and female role models in my teenage years have had a significant influence on my decision to minister to women of color and what is important to women: their children. An

important lesson I have learned is that women's stories have significantly impacted my growth. In addition, my grandmother's lessons and my father's storytelling abilities drew me closer to my paternal grandfather and grandmothers' strength in the Jim Crow South. My paternal grandmother stands out as an influential figure, as I often heard about her courage in standing up for her husband. He, in many circumstances, could not express himself fully because of racial discrimination.

The lessons I have learned through these stories of faith, persistence, and endurance, have shown me that Black women have a doggedness about them. No matter how harrowing the circumstances, they made it through. Their tenacity lends itself to a spirit of activism that helps families and communities thrive.

Early Childhood

I do not know if my mother or I began using the phrase, "You were born dead," but as a child, I was intrigued by my birth story. As mother tells it, after birthing me, I was not breathing, and it took more than the usual amount of time to take my first breath. Then, some thirty years later, the Holy Spirit spoke to me, saying, "You weren't born dead. Your first breath; I breathed into you." Through life's ups and downs, I know I have been kept by God.

I was born in Hartford, Connecticut, to Leroy and Irma Clemons at Hartford Hospital. Leroy was born and raised in a small town called Blountstown, Florida. They met when Irma went to live with her father and stepmother in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and Leroy went to college at the Milwaukee Institute of Technology at seventeen.

My mother's story of abuse by her stepmother has also shaped me. Irma was born poor in Mississippi and, by the age of fifteen, lived with her father and stepmother in Milwaukee. Her stepmother was abusive and stingy, so much so that her older brother would have to purchase her necessities like personal care products and winter coats because her stepmother refused to buy them for her. From time to time, Irma talks about her wedding day when her stepmother presented her with a Jelly Cake instead of a wedding cake. Of course, it did not help that her stepmother was a business owner and did quite well for herself and the family.

Another significant experience happened when I was approximately five years old when my mother would send me to the Hartford Public Library to attend the Saturday programming. There I would meet Mrs. Gertrude Blanks, a storyteller, known by the entire community. She was a gentle-looking woman with a strong spirit. She would read stories to us like most storytellers, changing the tone and pitch of her voice to convey what each character was thinking and feeling. According to the *Hartford Courant*, "Blanks came to storytelling by happenstance. She was working at the Hartford Public Library when the scheduled storyteller failed to show up. Blanks stepped in for her and discovered her true calling."⁴⁶ Looking back, I can see Mrs. Blanks' effect on my entire community, for me, and the generations that followed. My sister, who is six years my senior, remembers her time with Mrs. Blanks, who was not only utilized for educational

⁴⁶ Anne M. Hamilton, "A beloved Hartford storyteller who enchanted thousands," *Hartford Courant*, January 25, 2019, <https://www.courant.com/extraordinary-lives/hc-extraordinary-lives-gertrude-banks-0127-20190125-t6kwxg7ypzedlhoawskhhgfm-story.html>.

purposes but also for childcare for parents who needed time to shop or rest from parenting labors. Mrs. Blanks' story of "falling" into this position by chance reminds me of my own. Sometimes it just takes us being in the right place at the right time for God to use us.

My maternal grandmother, Artimease, was yet another female figure who encouraged me through her faith. She moved from Texas to live with us in Connecticut when I was around nine. Artimease told me a story about her childhood that shaped my life, and how I would think about God. She told me that she used to work for a white man when she was five years old. I am unsure about the circumstances of a five-year-old working so far from home, and at the time, I did not want to offend her parents, so I did not ask. Instead, I chalked it up to slavery and racism. Artimease's employer was verbally abusive, and at such a young age, she was so sad that on the way home, she kneeled next to a water well and prayed to God to answer her prayers and take her away from this man. She said, "At the well, a bright light shone down on me."

The next day, the Lord answered her prayers, and for reasons unbeknownst to her, she was removed from his employment and kept home. Artimease had a significant impact on me in hindsight. It would not be until much later that I began to think about what type of life she must have had as that five-year-old girl by the well. Her Godly encounter encouraged me to believe in God, who hears our cries, listens, and responds.

Teenage Years

My hometown of Bloomfield was extremely diverse when I was a teenager. I had a group of close friends who were Black, White, Jewish, and Asian. On the other hand, in

middle school, I was keenly aware of being a girl in a boy's world. I remember going home to tell my mother that Mr. Peacock, my English teacher, favored the boys over the girls. I complained so much my mother had to speak to him. He replied, "You know, she is probably right." I do not remember if things changed, but my mother often remembers how pro-woman I was at such a young age. I complained again when my industrial science teacher would only allow the girls to make ashtrays while the boys got to work on the machines. I had never been so mad in my life. Nothing changed. I still sat at a table with the other girls, who seemed perfectly content melting and molding ashtrays.

I had a Black teacher during my sophomore year in high school who was also influential in my development. She was the only Black teacher besides the gym teacher, and although I do not remember her name, she was only with us one semester; I remember her fondly. She was a business teacher and very professional. During my semester with her, we worked on WANG computers and our resumes to prepare us for the working world.

Because of my work on the resume, I was referred for a job at Bloomfield Town Hall in the Town Manager's office. After school, I would work for them until my senior year, when I was able to work almost full-time because I had the credits to do so. It was an enjoyable time in my life. I liked the independence it afforded me, and it helped me understand that my hard work could get me where I wanted to go. I also felt a bond with this teacher because she was the only female Black teacher I had seen in my school.

At thirteen years old, I was blessed to have a dynamic preacher named Traci West. Little did I know whose midst I was in and how she would influence me for years to come into the future. She is now a leading theologian and social activist. It was not

only Rev. Traci's way of interpreting the scriptures that profoundly impacted my thinking and understanding of God and Religion, but it was also because she embodied the Word of God for me. Even before thinking about ministry as a profession, I could see myself in her. She was African-American, young, a leader, married, and full of joy. I saw everything I could be in her. Undoubtedly, I imbibed liberating sermons, but her very embodiment made an impression on me.

Educational Development

After high school graduation, I attended Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Because of my empathetic nature and my concern for women's lives, I majored in social work. My internship was with Planned Parenthood, where I helped assist women in their reproductive journey. I will never forget a twelve-year-old coming into the clinic who was pregnant by a twenty-two-year-old man and helping doctors give AIDS test results back to people. It was a hard job, but I learned so much about empathy and the disparities that cause people to fall on hard times and into dangerous situations.

After graduation and a short stint working in other industries, I would enroll in Hunter Colleges Educational Counseling program. Although my focus was on school counseling, after an internship at a Domestic Violence (DV) shelter in Harlem, I decided to stay there because I enjoyed helping women as they planned to leave abusive relationships and start new and improved lives.

Help Haven was an emergency DV shelter located in Harlem. People fleeing from abuse would call the hotline, and we would tell them where to meet us. We would then meet them nearby and walk them to our shelter since the location was undisclosed. We

would then help them with their children, infants, and whatever else they could carry to their temporary home.

I started as a caseworker dealing with public benefits, housing, and other social service agencies. I learned about our systems' bureaucracy and the red tape that makes it feel like you will never get what your client needs. I still wonder how people get through our systems. After my internship ended, I was hired as a clinician and promoted to supervisor a year later.

I would later apply to Union Theological Seminary to begin my Master of Divinity journey. After receiving an academic scholarship to attend Union and seeing a picture of my former pastor, The Rev. Dr. Traci West, on the catalog cover, I knew it was God since I had not seen her since my youth. I knew it was no coincidence. I would also become the Associate Dean of Students, where I could use my counseling, coaching, and seminary education at every turn.

I worked at the DV shelter and became a seminary student until my third year at UTS. I had three great years of learning, and it is no coincidence that my education would lead to employment. It had been a theme throughout my life. I graduated from UTS in 2005 and began working for the seminary a few months later as the Assistant Dean of Students.

Professional Development

While at Hunter College, my casework internship led to a Clinician's role at Help Haven, where I could continue my education while earning a living. I enjoyed working with women, children, and men who entered our shelter. My worst case was with a

woman shot in the stomach by her boyfriend. She came straight from the hospital to the shelter. At the time, I was doing verbatims for class. In our sessions, I listened to the details of this woman's horrific abuse. Every line that the client and I said was recorded and then transcribed. It was hours upon hours of listening and then typing this woman's trauma. I learned about Vicarious Traumatization (VT) intimately, where those who work with trauma victims can take on their stress, anxiety, and depression just by listening to it. I suffered for months with this empathy overload.

Working with women who have suffered abuse from those who claim to love them completely changed my life. I also realized that VT is real, and it helped me understand what would happen to me while working at Union Theological Seminary as Associate Dean. Hunter and Help Haven would also help me work out some personal demons, like the violence I had experienced at the hand of my high school boyfriend and helped me grieve our grandson Jaleel who died from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

Our daughter Katrina was grieving over the death of her five-week-old child. It was the first time she sent Jaleel to stay with his father after his birth. We would be awakened by Katrina screaming as she listened to the baby's father on the other end of the phone. Jaleel would be in the hospital for three days with no brain activity. Finally, after counseling, Katrina decided to take Jaleel off life support. On that day, we let him go to be with the Lord. Katrina would grieve for a long time, and we supported her as best we could.

Over a year after Jaleel's death, I conducted a unit inspection at the shelter. I entered a unit and saw a baby wrapped up in a baby blue blanket and lying on his stomach. The baby was fine, but after telling the mother to reposition the baby and ensure

the blanket was not over his mouth, I returned to my office and broke down. I went home early, and for the next few days, I mourned and wept and began to heal, but unfortunately, this experience taught me how much humans could hold inside to the detriment of their health and sanity.

After graduating from UTS, an Assistant Dean for Student Life position opened. I thought about my counseling degree and soon-to-be Master of Divinity degree and knew I would be a good fit. My time working at Union was spirit-filled. I enjoyed being a help to the MDiv and Ph.D. students. Utilizing every skill and ability, I thrived at UTS. There was no seminary pastor, so those responsibilities also fell to me, and I was more than delighted. I felt whole as I was able to advocate for students and get to know the faculty better. This experience was quite the opposite of when I was in undergraduate school listening to my colleagues in social work classes; this time, I empathized with these students, called by God, who were both broken, yet healing, all at the same time. My last year as Associate Dean was tumultuous and challenging. Four students had to be rushed to the Emergency Room for attempting suicide. Again, I was able to witness human frailty up close and personal.

I would leave UTS burned out and broken with VT, specifically from that last semester. But I would heal with help and vowed again to help people through life's tragedies. After leaving Union to pastor VSPC, I knew I would need supplemental income because VSPC was part-time. So, I established my coaching practice, Restored Life Group (RLG), to offer women Transformational Life coaching and emotional freedom techniques. I am a support to those who need help.

As was stated previously in the Ministry Context, my non-profit organization was established in 2011 after my oldest son Jeyson was attacked by five youths. Black boys were hurting each other in initiation rituals, and police officers were also bullying youth of color in particular. One Black police officer would yell through a bullhorn at children who congregated in areas he thought they should not be. He would use his police radio up and down the street, “harassing” them after school and threatening arrests.

TWP has become a staple of outreach at VSPC and within the community. By this writing, it has seen over 150 young men in its classes and over 200 in Ghana, West Africa. The Africa program is in a juvenile detention center called the Senior Correctional Facility. TWP greatly influences the youth that the facility mandates all juveniles to complete our program before release. We are proud when the young men return after release and still remember what they have learned in TWP-Ghana.

Synergy

My ministry to women and children has been vital and enduring. Therefore, my ministry topic must involve women’s and children’s needs. The Valley Stream community has grown substantially in diversity and has become a community with many people of color. This community has also seen its share of Black mothers who have become activists developing programs when they see the need arise for their children, grandchildren, or community members. I have noticed that this is a trend in Valley Stream. Women’s stories of hardship and struggle inevitably become women’s businesses and programs that help the entire community. This prophetic activism is not something new for women of color. How women live their lives and the stories they

share inspire generation after generation. For example, my father told me a story about my grandmother that I shared with my children.

The story was of when my grandfather John worked for a mill that worked in pulp wood in Blountstown, Florida. He was responsible for cutting down trees and taking them to the pulp wood mill that would make them into paper. John had not received pay from his employer for three weeks; however, he continued to work until he found another job. One day his white employer came by his home, telling him to get into the car for work. Having had enough, he said he would not work because he had not received payment. The employer then got verbally aggressive, and John knew he could not defend himself in fear that this one conversation could lead to his death. Instead, my grandmother, Juanita, stepped in front of John and told the employer to get off of her land and that John would not return. She knew she could do what my grandfather could not do without fear of death. When this happened, my father was approximately eight years old and it left an indelible mark on him, as it later would for me. From this story, I learned that Black women, regardless of their second-class status in the world, have always stood up for their families — even in the face of danger.

Conclusion

With the onset of Covid-19 pandemic, we are entering a new world where activism is more important than ever. Black women will benefit from sharing stories of struggle and hardships, thus accessing their inner creativity and ability to provide for their families, children, and communities. Everything that helps mothers benefits children. Unfortunately, there will continue to be a need to fight against racism for our children, so

this project can be shared with other women and groups who would like to expand resources to Black and Brown women and children.

Gathering stories of women's struggles has been an inspiration to me. Hearing stories and bonding over stories encourages others' compassion to grow when they might not have previously. The stories of other women's lives have helped develop my character, and the stories that make up my life have also helped others in their journey toward wholeness.

I propose to show that Black women heal through the art of sharing and telling stories. By their very virtue, women are storytellers and, thus, prophetic activists because they create, build, and develop solutions just by speaking their truth. Their stories come from deep and often tragic experiences but also from the faith that provides solace as they work within their communities.

I hypothesize that when Black women share their stories of faith and hardship, they can encourage the spirit of activism in each other, improving their lives and their community's life. I will also explore whether sharing the stories of female prophetic activists from the Bible and from history can inspire modern-day Black women to embrace their legacy of prophetic activism. This research project will use the qualitative research method.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

In my ministry contexts at the Valley Stream Presbyterian Church (VSPC), The Restored Life Group (RLG), and The WANTED Project (TWP), most of the people I assist are Black women and youth. Helping to address their emotional and spiritual needs and using the stories of how others made it through difficult circumstances has inspired women to “Keep on keeping on” despite their hardships. These stories have inspired me since childhood and helped me serve and help my communities in many ways.

The Valley Stream community has seen its share of Black mothers who have become community activists, developing programs and support groups because they see the unaddressed needs for their children, grandchildren, and community members. I have noticed that activism is a trend in Valley Stream. Women’s stories of hardship and struggle, especially concerning their children, inevitably become women’s programs that help entire communities. Local congregations like VSPC are great places for women to gather around topics concerning family life, children, and community. It is most appropriate to find a biblical text or story for which women can relate to their current circumstances during these gatherings. In this Biblical Foundations chapter, I will discuss Rizpah’s story and how Black women can connect to her heroism as she protected her children’s dead bodies and changed her community with her actions. This activism is not

something new for Black women. To be a Black woman is to be a part of a long line of survivors. Stories that women share about their lives inspire generation after generation to speak truth to power and create change that benefits their children and communities. Based on my ministry contexts, I am led to develop a project to understand the motivation and tenacity behind Black women becoming community activists. I am also interested in whether hearing other women's stories of prophetic activism can inspire them to action. 2 Samuel 21:1-14 is the key pericope foundational to this project.¹ The themes of prophetic activism, patriarchy, misogyny, misogynoir, and women-centered groups are the general themes of this project.

Samuel: Historical Analysis

The Books of 1 and 2 Samuel began as one unit, named after Samuel, a prophet of the Lord.² The unified book of Samuel was divided into two books in the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, and then grouped with the book of Kings, which was also divided into two separate books.³ The books were thought to be divided as a rational division between King Saul and King David as 2 Samuel ends with the death of Saul.⁴ 1 and 2 Samuel are a part of the books called the Former Prophets in

¹ "2 Samuel 21:1-14," *New Revised Standard Version of the Bible*. Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references in this document are from the NRSV.

² Michael D. Coogan et al., ed., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha: New Revised Standard Version*, 2 Samuel 21:1-14 (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 405.

³ Coogan, *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 405.

⁴ Coogan, *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 453.

the Hebrew Bible.⁵ In most Christian Bibles, it is designated as a part of the historical books.⁶

The Babylonian Talmud identifies the prophet Samuel as the author of the book's sections that happened before his death; the rest is attributed to the prophets Nathan and Gad.⁷ However, "Modern scholars consider 1 and 2 Samuel to have been written by several anonymous authors, and generally often view it as part of a larger composition called the Deuteronomistic History (DH)."⁸ The DH contains the books Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings. The DH is believed to have been concluded after the Babylonian exile in 586 BCE.⁹

The books of Samuel are part of the DH following their entrance to Canaan under Joshua to the Babylonian exile.¹⁰ "The DH were a reformist movement in seventh century Judah who promoted fidelity to the Mosaic covenant: God had chosen and liberated Israel from slavery and granted them the land where they would live out their relationship with God."¹¹ In this relationship, God, through Moses, offers the people two choices: either be obedient to the covenant laws and prosper, or they can be disobedient and punished and

⁵ Coogan, *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 405.

⁶ Michael J. Gorman, ed., *Scripture and Its Interpretation: A Global, Ecumenical Introduction to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 36.

⁷ Coogan, *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 405.

⁸ Coogan, *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 405.

⁹ Coogan, *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 405.

¹⁰ Feidhlimidh T. Magennis, *First and Second Samuel*, vol. 8, ed. Daniel Durken (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 7.

¹¹ Magennis, *First and Second Samuel*, 7.

their land invaded or exiled.¹² The response to God's choices was recorded in the DH.¹³

The history was first composed in the time of King Josiah (640-609 BCE). After revisions during the Babylonian exile, the DH was divided into "books" for easier reading, and the Septuagint, the Greek translation, divided Samuel into 1 and 2 Samuel.¹⁴

It is essential to discuss Saul's kingship before proceeding to the book of 2 Samuel because the establishment of kings and the disobedience of the kings to God is the reason for so much upheaval in 2 Samuel.¹⁵ After the people ask Samuel for a king instead of the continuation of prophets, God approves this new form of government.¹⁶ Samuel takes this rebellion as a personal attack on God; however, God makes it clear that this is a pattern of God's people to rebel against God, beginning when God led the Israelites out of Egypt.¹⁷ "The granting of this request becomes the form of God's judgment on Israel as kings become both oppressively acquisitive and idolatrous."¹⁸ God assures the people that if they and their king are obedient to God and God's prophet, all will be well.¹⁹ "Saul is anointed as Israel's first king, commencing a period known as the

¹² Magennis, *First and Second Samuel*, 7.

¹³ Magennis, *First and Second Samuel*, 7.

¹⁴ Magennis, *First and Second Samuel*, 7.

¹⁵ Stephen Fowl, "Theological Interpretation of the Bible," in *Scripture and Its Interpretation: A Global, Ecumenical Introduction to the Bible*, ed. Michael J. Gorman (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017), 208.

¹⁶ Fowl, *Theological Interpretation*, 20.

¹⁷ Fowl, *Theological Interpretation*, 208.

¹⁸ Fowl, *Theological Interpretation*, 208.

¹⁹ Claire Mathews McGinnis, "The Scriptures of Israel," in *Scripture and Its Interpretation: A Global, Ecumenical Introduction to the Bible*, ed. Michael J. Gorman (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017), 75.

united monarchy (ca. 1025-928 BCE), but his disobedience results in God's rejection of him. Upon Saul's death, the kingship is given to David, son of Jesse."²⁰

The Book of 2 Samuel begins with King David's reign after his death.²¹ Although divinely providential, King David's installation as king was also highly political.²² David, who is not a blood heir to the throne, is granted the throne, not legally, but through God's divine intervention.²³ 1 and 2 Samuel are steeped in apologetics on behalf of David, who has God's favor that Michael David Coogan believes might have been based on a previous older apologetic work.²⁴ It is also one of the reasons why Coogan does not believe that 2 Samuel is an actual narrative based on "the apologetic spin of the book and the likely ulterior motives of the major characters, especially in cases where the narrative seems to 'protest too much' and suggests that the historical reality was often quite different from the narrative tale."²⁵

King David was a man of contradictions. According to the scriptures, he was sinful and in need of repentance (Ps 51); however, he was also the "apple of God's eye" and able to garner God's protection because of this favor (Ps 17:8). It is apparent in the reading of 2 Samuel that King David's reign continued to be fraught with political

²⁰ Karen J. Wenell, "The Setting: Biblical Geography, History, and Archeology," in *Scripture and Its Interpretation: A Global, Ecumenical Introduction to the Bible*, ed. Michael J. Gorman (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017), 53.

²¹ Michael David Coogan and Cynthia R Chapman, *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scripture*, 4th ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 243.

²² Coogan, *Historical and Literary Introduction*, 243.

²³ Coogan, *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 406.

²⁴ Coogan, *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 406.

²⁵ Coogan, *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 406.

upheaval.²⁶ In 1 Samuel, David is almost gentle as he grieves the loss of his enemies Abner, Absalom, and Amasa, which happens without David getting his hands dirty; however, in 2 Samuel, are we to believe that the deaths and end of Saul's entire lineage do not work out to the benefit of King David in our key pericope (2 Sm 21:1-14)?²⁷

2 Samuel: Literary Analysis

In Second Samuel, the authors use storytelling to narrate the stories of David's rise to King and other stories like that of Rizpah and her sons.²⁸ However, the reader must be careful not to confuse narratives with actual historical events.²⁹

[S]ome of the stories in 1 and 2 Sm are shaped according to traditional storytelling patterns, making it difficult to separate historical facts from the storyteller's art . . . [I]t would be hazardous to use these narratives to try to reconstruct [historical biographies].³⁰

The Deuteronomistic divisions in 2 Samuel are as follows:

1. 1 Sm 16 to 2 Sm 5, The History of David's Rise
2. 2 Sm 6, and originally a part of 1 Sm 4-6, the Ark Narrative
3. 2 Sm 7, a Dynastic Oracle Establishing the Supremacy of David and His Family
4. 2 Sm 9-20, 1 Kgs 1-2, the Succession Narrative/Court History

²⁶ Coogan, *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 406.

²⁷ Coogan, *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 453.

²⁸ Jo Ann Hackett, "1 and 2 Samuel," in *Women's Bible Commentary*, Expanded Edition, ed. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 150

²⁹ Hackett, "1 and 2 Samuel," 151.

³⁰ Hackett, "1 and 2 Samuel," 151.

5. 2 Sm 21-24, a Samuel Appendix inserted between the main body and conclusion of the Succession Narrative/Court History.³¹

The above five compositions were integrated into a single composition by the Deuteronomic historian.³² Further outlines within the divisions in David's storyline are presented as follows:

1. 2 Sm 1-27, David as Loyalist and Lamentor
2. 2 Sm 1-4:12, David as Regional King
3. 2 Sm 1-25, David as National King
4. 2 Sm 6:1-23, David as Ark Custodian
5. 2 Sm 7:1-29, David as Head of a House
6. 2 Sm 8:1-10:19, David as Warrior
7. 2 Sm 11:1-12:31, David as Adulterer, Murderer, and Penitent
8. 2 Sm 13 -14:33, David as Father of a Family in Turmoil
9. 2 Sm 15:1-18:33, David as Refugee and Distraught Father
10. 2 Sm 19:1-20:26, David as One Who Fights Adversity
11. 2 Sm 21:1-24:25, David as Executioner, Militarist, Hymnist, and Census-Taker³³

It is David as an executioner and militarist where we find the story of Rizpah and her sons, otherwise called "the execution of Saul's heirs."³⁴ "It is all but unanimous

³¹ Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Historical Books: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, Esther* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 297.

³² Hamilton, *Handbook on the Historical Books*, 297.

³³ Hamilton, *Handbook on the Historical Books*, 300.

³⁴ Coogan, *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 405.

among commentators to treat chapters 21-24 as a patchwork of miscellaneous materials about David that have been added to 2 Sm 9-20 as an appendix.”³⁵ There appears to be a relationship between 2 Sm 9:3 and 2 Sm 21:1-14 with experts believing that the killing of Saul’s sons probably took place in chapter 9 and not chapter 21, which could explain the links between the literary and thematic styles.³⁶ Also, the story of David sparing Mephibosheth’s life in 2 Sm presumes that Mephibosheth is the last of Saul’s sons.³⁷ The narratives of 2 Sm 21:1-14 and 24:1-25 are not set in the later years of King David and have nothing to do with the royal succession of kings.³⁸

Other scholars believe that 2 Sm 21–24 might not be as disconnected as once thought because “the three years of famine because of Saul’s atrocities (2 Sm 21:1) must be connected with the three years of famine toward the end of the unit in chapter 24, verse 13.”³⁹ Chapters 21 through 24 are arranged in the form of a chiasm.⁴⁰ A chiasm or chiasmus is an inverted sequence or a sequence that “crosses over,” resembling the Greek letter chi (X). The form is thus *a b b’ a’*.⁴¹ The purpose of the chiasm is to isolate the

³⁵ Hamilton, *Handbook on the Historical Books*, 359.

³⁶ David Toshio Tsumura, *The Second Book of Samuel* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019), 145-146.

³⁷ Bruce C. Birch, “The Books of Numbers and 2 Samuel,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 2, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville, KY: Abingdon Press, 1998), 1354.

³⁸ Birch, “The Books of Numbers and 2 Samuel,” 1357.

³⁹ Hamilton, *Handbook on the Historical Books*, 360.

⁴⁰ Hamilton, *Handbook on the Historical Books*, 360.

⁴¹ Donald K. McKim, *The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, Second Edition, Revised and Expanded (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014).

central section, drawing the readers' focus to David as hymnist (2 Sm 22:1-51; 23:1-7), and his God.⁴²

- a1 Saul's sin against the Gibeonites and its collective punishment (2 Sm 21:1-14)
- b1 David's heroes and their exploits (2 Sm 21:15-22)
- c1 David's psalm (2 Sm 22:1-51)
- c2 David's psalm (2 Sm 23:1-7)
- b2 David's heroes and their exploits (2 Sm 23:8-39)
- a2 David's sin against the census taboo and its collective punishment (2 Sm 24:1-25).⁴³

Although 2 Samuel seems "to lack cohesiveness . . . and that these narratives demand more collaboration from the reader in the quest for a meaningful interpretation, this perceived disconnection comes together in a similar chiasm."⁴⁴

- A. National crisis (2 Sm 21:1-14)
- B. Lists of David's warriors and accounts of heroic deeds (2 Sm 21:15-22)
- C. Poem (2 Sm 22:1-51)
- C'. Poem (2 Sm 23:1-7)
- B'. Lists of David's warriors and accounts of heroic deeds (2 Sm 23:8-39)
- A'. National crisis (2 Sm 24:1-25)⁴⁵

Likewise, Morrison shares that these last four chapters should not be seen as an afterthought, "which the *Oxford English Dictionary* characterizes as 'not essential to the text's completeness.'" ⁴⁶ It is the narrator's "final brush strokes" to his masterpiece.⁴⁷ Both in the longer set speeches and the interplay of dialogue, characters interact to influence and persuade, to express motivation and desire, and to shape the reader's

⁴² Hamilton, *Handbook on the Historical Books*, 360.

⁴³ Hamilton, *Handbook on the Historical Books*, 360.

⁴⁴ Craig E. Morrison, *Berit Olam: 2 Samuel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013), 276.

⁴⁵ Morrison, *Berit Olam: 2 Samuel*, 276.

⁴⁶ Morrison, *Berit Olam: 2 Samuel*, 276.

⁴⁷ Morrison, *Berit Olam: 2 Samuel*, 276.

understanding of issues (2 Sm 21:1). Within this literary structure, this pericope contains flashbacks indicating a portion in the text that looks back in time to portray an incident from the past.⁴⁸ The chiastic divisions specifically for the Rizpah story are as follows:

- A. God is angry (2 Sm 21:1)
- B. David seeks to resolve Saul's crime (flashback) (2 Sm 21:2-4)
- C. The Gibeonites' demand (2 Sm 21:5-6)
- D. David is faithful to his oath to Jonathan (2 Sm 21:7)
- C'. The Gibeonites' demand is met (2 Sm 21:8-9)
- B'. David accords Saul proper burial (flashback) (2 Sm 21:10-14c)
- A'. God is no longer angry (2 Sm 21:14d).⁴⁹

2 Samuel: Social/Cultural Analysis

Israel had been experiencing a consistent famine totaling three years (2 Sm 21:1). Because famine was seen as a consequence of disobedience in the Old Testament, King David asked the Lord why it was happening. The Lord answered that the famine was because of the bloodguilt attached to Saul and his descendants, referring to the pericope in Joshua 9. In Joshua 9, the kings from the hill countries, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites (The Amorite Alliance), decided to uprise against Joshua and Israel (Jo 9:3)⁵⁰. The Gibeonites, although not stated as part of the hill countries, according to Deuteronomistic History were probably once a part of the Amorites.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Morrison, *Berit Olam: 2 Samuel*, 276.

⁴⁹ Morrison, *Berit Olam: 2 Samuel*, 276.

⁵⁰ Coogan, *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 337.

⁵¹ Coogan, *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 485.

The Gibeonites in Joshua 9:3 are the background to the 2 Sm 21:1-14 text. After hearing what Joshua had done in Jericho and Ai and wanting to save their lives, the Gibeonites devised a plan to deceive Joshua and gain favor. This scheme was to trick Joshua and Israel into believing that they were not a part of the hill country kings but were travelers from far away who had nothing to do with the current battle (Jo 9:6). In this deceit, Joshua made an oath to them, “guaranteeing their lives” (Jo 9:8-15). This story reflects a theology linking public disaster to God’s anger, which needs appeasement.⁵² Faced with famine, David consults the Lord and learns of the bloodguilt of Saul’s house (2 Sm 21:1).⁵³

Attention must be drawn to the fact that the Gibeonites, who are living in the same land as the Israelites and enduring the same famine, did not reach out to King David; instead, it was David who went to the Gibeonites to inquire (2 Sm 21:2). After inquiring of the Lord, David called to speak with the Gibeonites in hopes of stopping the famine (2 Sm 21:2). David asks, “What shall I do for you? How shall I make expiation that you may bless the heritage of the Lord (2 Sm 21:3)?” The question, “What do you say that I should do for you” (2 Sm 21:4), apologetically guards David against any blame for putting to death Saul’s sons even though he benefits from it and will no longer need to fear any of Saul’s descendants.⁵⁴ Curiously, there is no record of Saul’s offense towards the Gibeonites.⁵⁵ It only appears that David knows about Saul’s bloodguilt.⁵⁶ It is only

⁵² Coogan, *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 485.

⁵³ Magennis, *First and Second Samuel*, 7.

⁵⁴ Birch, *Books of Numbers and 2 Samuel*, 1357.

⁵⁵ Birch, *Books of Numbers and 2 Samuel*, 1357.

⁵⁶ Birch, *Books of Numbers and 2 Samuel*, 1357.

mentioned in the 2 Sm pericope that Saul zealously “tried to wipe out” the Gibeonites (2 Sm 21:2). It is suggested that this could be just another piece of “David fabrication” that seeks to divert attention away from the fact that David is ridding himself of Saul’s lineage.⁵⁷

The Gibeonite’s response is cautious and does not name a price until the king gives his word to carry it out, thus absolving them from any future retaliation.⁵⁸ Instead, they demand the execution of seven descendants of Saul, both punishment for violating the agreement and an offering to the Lord to eliminate the sin of bloodguilt.⁵⁹ “The number seven signifies completeness and is much less than the amount of Gibeonites killed by Saul, suggesting full restitution.”⁶⁰ Two of the seven sons are sons of Rizpah, who was Saul’s concubine.⁶¹ Her sons were Ai and Mephibosheth, not to be confused with Jonathan’s son Mephibosheth (Merri-baal).⁶² The other five sons were the grandsons of Saul and the sons of his daughter Merab.⁶³

David handed over these seven men to be killed but honors his oath to his friend Jonathan so that Jonathan’s son Mephibosheth, who is disabled, is spared (2 Sm 21:7). Mephibosheth seemingly is disqualified from becoming king and therefore not a threat to

⁵⁷ Birch, *Books of Numbers and 2 Samuel*, 1357.

⁵⁸ Birch, *Books of Numbers and 2 Samuel*, 1357.

⁵⁹ Magennis, *First and Second Samuel*, 7.

⁶⁰ Craig S. Keener and John H. Walton, eds, *NRSV, Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible: Bringing to Life the Ancient World of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 555.

⁶¹ Birch, *Books of Numbers and 2 Samuel*, 1359.

⁶² Birch, *Books of Numbers and 2 Samuel*, 1359.

⁶³ Birch, *Books of Numbers and 2 Samuel*, 1359.

King David's reign.⁶⁴ "It is notable that typically a new king would eradicate the lineage of the former kings so there would be no uprisings or potential hostile takeovers."⁶⁵ In this instance, "Saul's alleged offense provides a religious legitimization for this political act."⁶⁶

The seven sons of Saul perished together; put to death in the first days of harvest, at the beginning of barley harvest. Then Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth, and spread it on a rock for herself, from the beginning of harvest until rain fell on them from the heavens; she did not allow the birds of the air to come on the bodies by day, or the wild animals by night (2 Sm 21:9-10).

In Israel, having the dead's bodies ravaged by birds and other animals was a disgrace. It was a curse between warring factions to kill their enemy and then allow bodies to be eaten by animals instead of receiving a proper burial.⁶⁷ Deuteronomy 28:26 informs this curse, "Your corpses shall be food for every bird of the air and animal of the earth, and there shall be no one to frighten them away."⁶⁸ Rizpah would have known about this curse and did not allow her sons' bodies to be desecrated in this way.⁶⁹ This act of leaving bodies to be eaten by prey was about complete and utter humiliation.⁷⁰ Rizpah sat vigil by the bodies of her sons until the rain fell.⁷¹ This vigil began at the beginning of the barley harvest, which began in April. Therefore, the rain that fell after Rizpah sat vigil

⁶⁴ Coogan, *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 459.

⁶⁵ Coogan, *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 485.

⁶⁶ Coogan, *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 459.

⁶⁷ Keener, *Cultural Backgrounds*, 556.

⁶⁸ Keener, *Cultural Backgrounds*, 346.

⁶⁹ Keener, *Cultural Backgrounds*, 556.

⁷⁰ Keener, *Cultural Backgrounds*, 346.

⁷¹ Keener, *Cultural Backgrounds*, 556.

was an unseasonal deluge that ended the famine, “rather than the beginning of ‘winter rains,’ which could not commence until late October.”⁷²

Rizpah, “refusing to accept this fate for her sons, fends off the scavengers by day and night.”⁷³ When David hears of Rizpah’s actions, he reacts by honoring the seven dead sons, as well as Saul and Jonathan, who had been buried in Jabesh-Gilead, and rescued their bodies from the walls of a Philistine city called Beth-shan.⁷⁴ The reader is not told why David has a change of heart and honors these once humiliated men.⁷⁵ “He [David] gives their bones and the bodies of those now executed an honorable burial (13-14a). Saul and Jonathan are laid to rest in the tomb of Saul’s father, Kish (v.14a). Only after their burial does God heed prayers on behalf of the famine-parched land (v.14b).”⁷⁶

2 Samuel: Major Themes

It is interesting to note that 1 Samuel begins with Hannah’s mothering story telling of her inability to conceive a child⁷⁷, and the book of 2 Samuel ends with the dramatic narrative of another mother, Rizpah, who must protect her sons from humiliation in their deaths.⁷⁸ Illse Mueller states, “[Hannah] becomes the first biblical

⁷² Keener, *Cultural Backgrounds*, 556.

⁷³ Birch, *Books of Numbers and 2 Samuel*, 1359.

⁷⁴ Birch, *Books of Numbers and 2 Samuel*, 1359.

⁷⁵ Birch, *Books of Numbers and 2 Samuel*, 1359.

⁷⁶ Birch, *Books of Numbers and 2 Samuel*, 1359.

⁷⁷ Luise Schottroff, Marie-Theres Wacker, and Martin Rumscheidt, *Feminist Biblical Interpretation: A Compendium of Critical Commentary on the Books of the Bible and Related Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publications, 2012), 141-43.

⁷⁸ Schottroff, *Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, 141-43.

female character figure to turn, in the misery of her childlessness, to the Living one.”⁷⁹

Hannah’s spiritual pursuits are contrasted with the inaction of the men in the story.⁸⁰

Hannah, through her actions, can solidify her unborn son’s career path through a vow to God, name her son, gains acceptance of a new form of praying, and is rewarded for her activities with the ability to birth five more children (1 Sm 2:20-21).⁸¹ And with all of Hannah’s rewards for her virtue and relationship with God, her story is still wrapped up in competition with Peninah, where if Hannah wins, then Peninah must lose in the end.⁸² According to the male writer’s perspective, one must win, and the other must lose.⁸³

In this motif of competition between women, the ‘barren’ is set against the one ‘who has many children’ (1 Samuel 2:5). [H]er pregnancy is a contribution to the reversal of the situation.⁸⁴

The dualisms of mighty and feeble, full and hungry are ambivalent. They reduce enigmatic reality to black-white contrasts; the liberation of the barren woman requires the defeat of the one with many children.⁸⁵

Instead of the story being primarily about one woman’s rescue from barrenness, her story becomes more of a social and political statement that makes women and their reproductive health a statement of political liberation.⁸⁶

⁷⁹ Schottroff, *Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, 142.

⁸⁰ Schottroff, *Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, 142.

⁸¹ Schottroff, *Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, 142.

⁸² Schottroff, *Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, 142.

⁸³ Schottroff, *Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, 142.

⁸⁴ Schottroff, *Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, 142.

⁸⁵ Schottroff, *Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, 142.

⁸⁶ Schottroff, *Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, 142.

At the close of the once united book of Samuel, we meet Rizpah, Saul's concubine, Merab, Saul's daughter, and their sons, who are heirs to Saul's throne.⁸⁷ Rizpah and her sons are used in a political battle to restore the land ruined due to Saul's slaughter of the Gibeonites, who were given an oath not to kill.⁸⁸ Rizpah's sons stood in the way of a peaceful transition of the ruling order and of assurances given in deceit.⁸⁹ Rizpah holds space for her sons for approximately six months until the rain comes and the famine begins its end "and points to God's saving grace."⁹⁰ However, it is still a story encased in male political struggle.⁹¹ Rizpah's act of protection over her and Merab's sons cause David's shame, politically, so he decides he will do the "right" thing and have Saul and "his sons" buried honorably.⁹² Mueller states, "Women's concerns for life and death brings them into conflict with representatives of the ruling order. Peninnah, Eli, and David personify attitudes of hatred for life and disdain for human beings."⁹³ "The position of women on the threshold between life and death brings dangers; these women defy by their resistance to the powers of indifference and death."⁹⁴ Motherhood in the Bible is usually limited to that of reproduction and protective roles. When a mother comes to the defense of her children, it is typically the male and not the female children.⁹⁵

⁸⁷ Schottroff, *Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, 142.

⁸⁸ Schottroff, *Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, 143.

⁸⁹ Schottroff, *Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, 143.

⁹⁰ Schottroff, *Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, 143.

⁹¹ Schottroff, *Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, 143.

⁹² Schottroff, *Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, 143.

⁹³ Schottroff, *Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, 143.

⁹⁴ Schottroff, *Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, 143.

There is no mention of a mother's intervention on behalf of Dinah, Leah, or Tamar, who were raped.⁹⁶ "A woman who buys the conventional prejudices of a society is also one who will impute those to others and who will adhere to the fundamental value systems of the social structure. In this case the dominant system is patriarchy."⁹⁷

Through Hannah's story, we can view Rizpah's defense of her sons as unspoken words to the Lord, whereas the world of men silences her voice. "Hannah only speaks her heart to and is only heard by YHWH. Her marginalization in the world of men, of human power, is emphasized by Elkanah's failure to let her speak and Eli's failure to respond meaningfully to her emotional appeal."⁹⁸ On the other hand, YHWH hears Hannah's prayers and pleas, proving that YHWH listens to females and males alike. This relationship between Hannah and her God nullifies her human marginalization.⁹⁹

Who holds power is evident in this pericope because the story is about king succession and who has the ability to select a successor's future when the time comes.¹⁰⁰ "The books of Samuel are deeply interested in the possession, use, and abuse of power. All power and authority devolve from the Lord, and in a covenant society, the use of power must comply with the norms of the covenant."¹⁰¹ Human beings must obey the

⁹⁵ Esther Fuchs, "The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics in Hebrew Politics," in *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader*, ed. Alice Bach (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999), 136.

⁹⁶ Fuchs, "The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics in Hebrew Politics," 136.

⁹⁷ Fuchs, "The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics in Hebrew Politics," 136.

⁹⁸ Fuchs, "The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics in Hebrew Politics," 136.

⁹⁹ Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, "A Son is Born to Naomi! Literary Allusions and Interpretation in the Book of Ruth," in *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader*, ed. Alice Bach (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999), 236.

¹⁰⁰ Magennis, *First and Second Samuel*, 7.

¹⁰¹ Magennis, *First and Second Samuel*, 7.

Lord in their dealings with one another, and leaders must abide by the Lord's commands or risk losing their status and position.¹⁰² Because the Lord's commands are divine, kings cannot use power for personal benefit.¹⁰³

2 Samuel: Word Study

Keywords integral to understanding the 2 Sm 21:1-14 pericope are famine (2 Sm 21:1), sworn/oath (2 Sm 21:2), and expiation/atonement (2 Sm 21:3). The first word, "famine" in Hebrew is *rā`āb*.¹⁰⁴ In its Ugaritic root form, *rgb*, it appears nineteen times.¹⁰⁵ It is a noun in the masculine form and is a singular absolute.¹⁰⁶ This word is always used to indicate human hunger and is always under the providence of God (Ps 33:19). *Rā`āb* occurs over 100 times in the Old Testament and occurs the most in Genesis, chapters 41-47.¹⁰⁷ In this instance, famine (*rā`āb*) is used eighty-seven times.¹⁰⁸ Other derivatives of famine include hunger, used eight times; dearth five times; and famished, used once.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰² Magennis, *First and Second Samuel*, 7.

¹⁰³ Magennis, *First and Second Samuel*, 7.

¹⁰⁴ Laird R. Harris, *Theological Wordbook* (Chicago, IL: The Moody Bible Institute, 1980), 852.

¹⁰⁵ Harris, *Theological Wordbook*, 852.

¹⁰⁶ F. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, Coded with Strong's Concordance Numbers* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2020), 944.

¹⁰⁷ Harris, *Theological Wordbook*, 852.

¹⁰⁸ *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, March 25, 2021, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/concordances/strongs-exhaustive-concordance/>.

¹⁰⁹ *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, March 25, 2021, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/concordances/strongs-exhaustive-concordance/>.

In the book of Jeremiah, famine is listed with sword and pestilence as one of God's three great judgments.¹¹⁰ Food distribution and preservation were limited, so famine meant starvation and hardship for many inhabitants.¹¹¹ However, famine is used only once in the 2 Sm 21:1-14 pericope and refers to a famine totaling three years under King David's reign (2 Sm 21:1). David and Israel assumed that disobedience was the cause of this great famine.¹¹²

The second word in this study is "sworn," a verb defined as "oath" and "to swear."¹¹³ The Hebrew translation is *shāba*, which occurs 184 times in the Old Testament.¹¹⁴ The root of *shāba* is *sheba*, which is "identical to the feminine form of seven, the masculine adding a fourth letter 'he' . . ."¹¹⁵ The word covenant is a verb and an active participle.¹¹⁶ "The number seven signifies completeness, and Rizpah lost seven sons (2 Sm 21:6) because of the sworn oath."¹¹⁷ In the Old Testament, to swear is to give "one's sacred unbreakable word in testimony that the one swearing would faithfully perform some promise deed or that he would refrain from some evil act as in Gen 21:23, 'swear that thou will not deal falsely with me.'"¹¹⁸ The word sworn is used once in 2 Sm

¹¹⁰ Harris, *Theological Wordbook*, 852.

¹¹¹ Harris, *Theological Wordbook*, 852.

¹¹² Coogan, *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 485.

¹¹³ *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, March 25, 2021, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/concordances/strongs-exhaustive-concordance/>.

¹¹⁴ Harris, *Theological Wordbook*, 898.

¹¹⁵ Harris, *Theological Wordbook*, 898.

¹¹⁶ Brown, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 989.

¹¹⁷ Keener, *Cultural Backgrounds*, 555.

¹¹⁸ Harris, *Theological Wordbook*, 900.

to describe the agreement between Joshua and the Gibeonites (Jo 9:3). “So holy and sacred was an oath sworn in Jehovah’s name that the leaders of Israel, after being intentionally deceived by the nearby condemned Gibeonites, declared, ‘We have sworn unto them by the Lord God of Israel: now, therefore, we may not touch them.’ (Jo 9:19).”¹¹⁹

The word “oath” appears once in the text and again refers to the covenant between Joshua and the Gibeonites (Jo 9:3). Oath or *shebū`ā* is a noun that appears thirty times in the Old Testament.¹²⁰ An oath is similar, but not the same as a covenant, in that an oath is a solemn verbal statement, or a pledge affirmed, whereas a covenant is the actual substance of such agreement.¹²¹ In other words, one will swear an oath while a covenant is established or “caused to stand.”¹²² For example, men and women would swear oaths to perform acts in the future (Jo 9:20) and to solemnize peace treaties (1 Chr 15:15).¹²³ Jonathan and David had an oath that Mephibosheth would be protected into the future, which David abided by in 2 Sm 21:7.

Expiation or atonement is the third word in this word study. The Hebrew word is *kāpar*, a denominative verb that means “I, make an atonement, make reconciliation, and purge.”¹²⁴ The word atonement is a perfect verb that draws attention to an already

¹¹⁹ Harris, *Theological Wordbook*, 900.

¹²⁰ Harris, *Theological Wordbook*, 900.

¹²¹ Harris, *Theological Wordbook*, 900.

¹²² Harris, *Theological Wordbook*, 900.

¹²³ Harris, *Theological Wordbook*, 901.

¹²⁴ Harris, *Theological Wordbook*, 452.

completed task.¹²⁵ The definition of expiation is the act of making satisfaction or atonement for any crime or fault and extinguishing guilt by suffering or penalty. This definition also speaks to how reparation or atonement for crimes or sins is made; an expiatory sacrifice or offering, an atonement.¹²⁶

It has been suggested that the Old Testament ritual symbolized a covering over sin until it was dealt with . . . by the atonement of Christ. There is, however, very little evidence for this view. The connection of the Arabic word is weak, and the Hebrew root is not used to mean ‘cover.’¹²⁷

Expiation is used approximately 150 times in the Old Testament.¹²⁸

Conclusion

Rizpah and her sons take a more central role in this pericope because her prophetic actions and relationship with God were the catalyst for the healing of the land in 2 Sm 21:1-14. Rizpah protected her dead sons’ bodies and her prophetic acts led to a healed land. Her sacrifice of protecting her sons’ bodies for seven months through extreme weather and wild animals inspired David to Compassion and motivated him to honor the bones of Saul and his sons with a proper burial (2 Sm 21:10-14).

Rizpah, Saul’s secondary wife, is a mother to her sons Armoni and Mephibaal, called Mephibosheth, but she does not stop her role as mother of her children but also stands as a mother to five other sons in their death.¹²⁹ Although she is a low-status wife, a

¹²⁵ Brown, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 497.

¹²⁶ *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. “expiation,” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/expiation>.

¹²⁷ Harris, *Theological Wordbook*, 452.

¹²⁸ Harris, *Theological Wordbook*, 452.

pilegesh (*piylegesh*), her sons were legitimate, although not entitled to the family's inheritance.¹³⁰ Rizpah is the daughter of Aiah, whose gender is unknown since no verb is attached to determine gender.¹³¹ After Saul's death, Rizpah becomes political fodder between the houses of Saul and David because she and her children hold an unrealized power and threat to King David's reign.¹³² "Rizpah is accessible and vulnerable; her secondary status translates into a lack of financial and other insulating resources."¹³³ In this example, the lives of the sons of Rizpah, the secondary wife, and Merab, the daughter of Saul, are threatened not only because of the change in regime from Saul to David but precisely because these sons are sons of women who are of low status, who suffer financially, and lack resources. Like Black women, their sons' lives are at risk not only because of their race but also because they are sons of mothers with little resources.

Rizpah, in her rape, and the death of her sons, fell "casualty to the messy, bloody business of kingmaking" (2 Sm 3:7–8).¹³⁴ She is among a list of biblical and modern-day women consumed and rejected because of their secondary status. However, despite their status, Rizpah and other women like her continue to protect their children, even in death Rizpah, standing under the bodies of her hanged sons, batting away scavengers to her detriment, is what Black mothers do daily. She must protect her sons' Black bodies in death, if not life. "[Rizpah] asserts herself for the only time in the text to protect the

¹²⁹ Wil C. Gafney, *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and The Throne* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 198.

¹³⁰ Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*, 198.

¹³¹ Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*, 198.

¹³² Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*, 198-99.

¹³³ Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*, 199.

¹³⁴ Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*, 198.

bodies of her sons in death, as she could not in life.”¹³⁵ Rizpah moves into activism by standing up for her sons, even in death, fighting against the ills surrounding them and trying to tear the flesh from their bones.

In her activism, Rizpah continues to suffer losses and laments the injustices attached to being a woman. Still, while doing so, attention is drawn to her resolve, cause, and sons, creating change within her community. “Moved by her actions, David retrieves the unburied bones of Saul and Jonathan, and God breaks the famine.”¹³⁶ Unfortunately, because of the still male-dominated society in which we live, where women continue to be marginalized and pushed to the edges of society, we need to fully support the Rizpahs of our current world, which will solve many of the issues within our communities. The problems I will be addressing in this project are: (1) the tremendous lack of resources for Black women who seek to make a change in their communities; (2) Black women and their children are often casualties of the political structures within their societies and of the men who dominate the political landscape; and (3) the need for women to support other Black women in partnership to support their efforts to thrive in our modern-day society.

If more Black women were supported in their activism efforts, their children would have a path to success despite economic, gender, and racial inequities. Funding and programs geared towards women, by women, sharing stories and financial and educational resources, can encourage Black women, once marginalized, to walk in the

¹³⁵ Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*, 200.

¹³⁶ Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*, 200.

power of Rizpah. Through such programming, entire communities will benefit from women's capacity to protect and empower their communities.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

In this historical foundations chapter, the life of Ida B. Wells-Barnett, who was catapulted into the anti-lynching arena when three friends were lynched at the hands of an angry mob, will be addressed.¹ “Born a slave in Civil War-ravaged Mississippi, Wells achieved freedom with emancipation and international renown in the 1890s, when she rose to fame as a journalist, speaker, and civil rights activist who led an international crusade against lynching.”² Lynching was so commonplace by the 1890s that the bodies of Black men, women, and children adorned the faces of postcards venerating these events.³ However, until Wells began her anti-lynching crusade, the mob violence resulting in murder went unimpeded.⁴ During the post-Civil War, Wells became an assertive leader who fought against the loss of civil and political rights for Black people

¹ Ida B. Wells, *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892-1900*, The Bedford Series in History and Culture, ed. Jacqueline Jones Royster (Boston, MA: and New York, NY: Bedford/St. Martins), 3.

² Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely: The Life of Ida B. Wells* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang), 3.

³ Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 3.

⁴ Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 3.

because of the white backlash to the Reconstruction era, which allowed the newly freed slaves advantages and social freedoms such as voting rights and political power.⁵

Anxious to restore the white supremacy that slavery had once guaranteed, white Southerners used mob violence, political terrorism, and election fraud to drive the freed people and their Republican allies out of politics. What came next was Jim Crow South, where few African Americans voted, and all were subject to segregation and many other forms of legal and economic discrimination. While white Southerners called the end of Reconstruction a blessed ‘Redemption,’ among African Americans it represented a devastating setback in the struggle for freedom.⁶

Wells represented a new Black leadership in combating the ills of the Jim Crow South.⁷

This chapter explores the type of world in which Ida B. Wells was born. “To be black and born a slave in the American south in 1862, as Wells was, was to enter the world in the middle of a revolution brought on by cataclysmic civil war and its aftermath.”⁸ Wells’ parentage and significant events like Emancipation, the Civil War, and Reconstruction will be discussed. They are essential to the making of Wells-Barnett’s ideology and future anti-lynching work.⁹ “This remarkable experience was one of the sources of Ida’s lifelong belief in activism and social change. Her childhood coincided with her parents’ first years of freedom, and she grew up alongside parents who were intent on remaking themselves and their children as free people.”¹⁰ Finally, lynching will be addressed, in general, but specifically the Curve Lynching, where Tom Moss, Calvin

⁵ Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 4.

⁶ Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 4.

⁷ Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 4.

⁸ Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 15.

⁹ Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 22.

¹⁰ Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 22.

McDowell, and Henry Stewart, friends of Wells, were murdered, and how Wells began her crusade against lynching and white mob violence.¹¹ Until her death in 1931, Wells blazed a trail with her work as a diarist, editor, journalist, lecturer, suffragist, anti-lynching crusader, and civil rights activist.¹² “Her work of essays, pamphlets, and newspaper articles shaped the post-Reconstruction discourse on race, while her narratives, including two diaries, a travel journal, and an autobiography, recorded personal struggles of a professional woman to define African American womanhood in a pivotal era of American history.”¹³

Ida B. Wells-Barnett

Elizabeth and James Wells, Emancipation, and the Reconstruction Era

Ida B. Wells was born to Elizabeth and James Wells on July 16, 1862.¹⁴ Elizabeth, also known by Liza and Lizza, was born into slavery, taken from her family as a young girl, and finally was purchased by Spires Boling, who created and developed the town of Holly Springs in Mississippi.¹⁵ Boling was said to have never used corporal

¹¹ Ida B. Wells, *The Memphis Diary of Ida B. Wells*, ed. Miriam DeCosta-Willis (Boston, MA: Beacon Press), 1.

¹² William L. Andrews, Frances Smith Foster, and Trudier Harris, ed., *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature* (New York, NY: and Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press), 763.

¹³ Andrews, Foster, and Harris, *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*, 763.

¹⁴ Paula J. Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions: Ida B. Wells and the Campaign Against Lynching* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers), 15-19.

¹⁵ Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*, 15.

punishment, which was much different than Elizabeth's previous master.¹⁶ After Elizabeth and her two sisters were separated from their family members, she was never again able to locate them, even after Emancipation.¹⁷ James, also known as Jim, "was the son of his master, who owned a plantation in Tippah County, Mississippi, and his mother, Peggy."¹⁸

James grew up on the estate of Morgan Wells, his father, and his mother, an enslaved woman who had lived there since the 1840s.¹⁹ It coheres that James would be given a chance to later become an apprentice to Spires Boling and his building projects, as James' mother, Peggy, was said to have had a special relationship with Morgan Wells.²⁰ This sentiment was evidenced by "a later-revealed jealousy of Morgan's wife, Margaret, who indicated that the black woman may have been favored in the household, including three of James's half-siblings, all of whom had a black father."²¹ "He [James] was never whipped or put on the auction block, and he knew little of the cruelties of slavery."²² It was also made more apparent after the death of Morgan Wells, where James and Lizzie, who had become a family expecting their first child Ida, had to bear the knowledge of the "stripping and whipping" of Peggy Wells.²³

¹⁶ Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*, 15.

¹⁷ Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 22.

¹⁸ Ida B. Wells, *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*, ed. Alfreda M. Duster (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press), 8.

¹⁹ Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*, 19.

²⁰ Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*, 19.

²¹ Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*, 19.

²² Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 8.

²³ Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*, 20.

Other events impacting Ida's growth were the election of President Abraham Lincoln in 1860, The Memphis Riots in 1866, the Civil War, the Emancipation of slaves, and Confederate victories of General Robert E. Lee, which White Holly Springs' residents vociferously celebrated.²⁴ During the Civil War, Holly Springs was a hotbed of action, having witnessed the entry of the Union's General Ulysses S. Grant, who made Holly Springs his headquarters.²⁵ It was also the location of both the Rebel arsenal and a Union supply depository and therefore was under siege by both Union and Confederate armies. Throughout the war, it changed hands over fifty times.²⁶ The Mississippi Railroad, which stockpiled ammunition for the Union, was destroyed along with the land surrounding it.²⁷ Nevertheless, the Union was victorious, making Holly Springs the "regional headquarters for the Freedmen's Bureau — a government agency that managed freedmen's labor contracts, kept registers of their marriages, and, in cooperation with other charitable agencies, issued food, clothing, and medical supplies and established high schools."²⁸

The Civil war was terrifying "to those invested in the institution of slavery and exciting to those in bondage who believed the war might bring freedom."²⁹

²⁴ Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*, 20.

²⁵ Giddings, *A Sword Among Lions*, 21-22.

²⁶ Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 20.

²⁷ Giddings, *A Sword Among Lions*, 21.

²⁸ Giddings, *A Sword Among Lions*, 21-22.

²⁹ Crystal N. Feimster, *southern horrors: women and the politics of rape and lynching* (Cambridge, MA: and London, UK: Harvard University Press, 2009), 2.

On May 4, 1854, the war ended when the Confederate army conceded, which ushered in Emancipation bringing many victories and tragedies to the newly emancipated Black people.³⁰ “The vast majority of freed people were agricultural laborers who came out of slavery with ‘nothing but freedom.’”³¹ James was able to finally work in his trade of carpentry for wages at the Boling business; however, because of the political climate between Blacks and whites in November 1867 and the new law that Black men could exercise their rights to vote, it cost James his employment but not his dignity.³²

Mr. Bolling wanted him to vote the Democratic ticket, which he refused to do. When he returned from voting he found the shop locked, but when Mr. Bolling returned, he found he had lost a workman and a tenant, for already Wells had moved his family off the Bolling place.³³

Many newly freedmen, too, exercised their voting privileges, and in the 1870s, the Wells family witnessed a true reformation in the political arena that affected both Blacks and whites.³⁴

“Mississippi’s first Reconstruction legislature included forty African Americans, several freedmen ranging from John R. Lynch as Speaker of the House, Lieutenant Governor A. K. Davis, Secretary of State James Hill, and Superintendent of Education T. W. Cordozo.”³⁵ “For Ida, whose earliest memory was reading a newspaper to her father and his ‘admiring’ friends, the sense of possibility demonstrated by stories in the press

³⁰ Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 18-19.

³¹ Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 19.

³² Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*, 23-26.

³³ Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 9.

³⁴ Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*, 26.

³⁵ Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*, 26.

and personal relationships with those involved in the day's developments must have been palpable."³⁶ But because of these triumphs, whites were enraged and took out their anger in various ways, such as race riots, rapes of Black women, robberies, assault and batteries, public embarrassments like the hanging of effigies denigrating Black people, and the many cases of abuse committed by the Ku Klux Klan.³⁷ Ida would not have known at the age of four that not too far away in Memphis, Tennessee, "A White mob swept through the streets . . . pillaging, burning, raping, and murdering innocent people."³⁸ According to the U.S. Congress in 1866, the three-day rampage ended with:

46 men, women, and children killed

75 wounded

5 women raped

100 robberies

91 houses burned

4 churches burned

12 schools burned.³⁹

As Black people began to take pride in their collective progress as a race, both personally and politically, they posed a threat to white supremacy, so the crime of rape became the scapegoat for white mob violence against suspects and sometimes entire communities.⁴⁰

³⁶ Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*, 26-27.

³⁷ Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*, 23-24.

³⁸ Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*, 24.

³⁹ Wells, *The Memphis Diary*, 1.

⁴⁰ Scot French, *The Rebellious Slave Nat Turner in American Memory* (Boston, MA: and New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004), 163.

White Southerners explicitly conflated Black men's alleged sexual misconduct toward white women with the newly won right to vote.⁴¹ Still, African Americans continued to hold their ground despite the many attacks by whites.⁴²

Ida B. Wells: Education and Family Life

Wells attended Shaw University in 1877.⁴³ Later, Shaw would be known as Rust College, where her father would become a trustee.⁴⁴ While reading the local newspaper that filled her with hope, she also learned about the Ku Klux Klan and became familiar with their acts long before knowing what that meant.⁴⁵ "I knew dimly that it meant something fearful, by the anxious way my mother walked the floor at night when my father was out to a political meeting."⁴⁶ Because Ida grew up in Holly Springs, where white female students engaged in a liberal arts curriculum, she sought to become an avid reader. She desired the white woman's type of education minus the practical training of washing and ironing included in her curriculum.⁴⁷ Ida's other education, her life experience, would come from hearing stories of her grandmother Peggy's whipping and through the experiential realities of life, one of which was the deaths of her mother,

⁴¹ Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the 19th-Century South* (New Haven, CT: and London, UK: Yale University Press, 1997), 6.

⁴² Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*, 24.

⁴³ Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*, 31.

⁴⁴ Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 9.

⁴⁵ Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 9.

⁴⁶ Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 9.

⁴⁷ Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*, 31.

father, and younger brother from Yellow Fever in 1878.⁴⁸ Yellow fever ripped through the South and fueled racism. White enslavers argued to keep slaves as a labor force because they seldom fell ill to fevers, presumably because they were immune after frequently being exposed while working the fields.⁴⁹

Ida would have been sixteen years old when she returned to Holly Springs from visiting her grandmother Peggy to take care of her siblings after her parents' death; her childhood was replaced with work and worry as she now had to support her siblings.⁵⁰ After refusing to separate her siblings, friends advised Ida to apply for a country school teaching position where she made twenty-five dollars a month.⁵¹ Her grandmother Peggy came to help her until she fell ill with a stroke.⁵² Soon after that, under her aunt's invitation, Wells moved to Memphis with her two youngest siblings; the other siblings would be under the care of relatives in Mississippi.⁵³ "In 1882 or 1883, Wells began teaching in a rural town called Woodstock, Tennessee, and by 1884, she had obtained a teaching position in a public school in Memphis."⁵⁴ Wells would never complete her formal education, but her relentless pursuit of self-education propelled her into a

⁴⁸ Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*, 24, 36.

⁴⁹ Molly Caldwell Crosby, *The American Plague: The untold story of Yellow Fever, the Epidemic that shaped our History* (New York, NY: The Berkeley Publishing Group, 2006), 78.

⁵⁰ Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 16.

⁵¹ Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 17.

⁵² Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 17.

⁵³ Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 18.

⁵⁴ Andrews, Foster, and Harris, *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*, 763.

journalism career that yielded her the designation of the “pre-eminent female journalist of her day.”⁵⁵

Before her anti-lynching work, Wells was already a social activist. In 1884, she sued the Chesapeake, Ohio and the Southwestern Railroad after being forcibly removed from the ladies’ first-class section.⁵⁶ Wells refused to move to the smoking car, and “annoyed at her refusal, the conductor grabbed her arm and tried to drag her from her seat.”⁵⁷

Wells fought back, sinking her teeth into the back of his hand and bracing her feet firmly against the seat in front of her. Three white men then successfully forced Wells from her seat to the loud accompaniment of the white passengers who stood upon the cushions to gain a better view and shouted and applauded.⁵⁸

The court’s decision at first went in her favor; however, three years later, the Tennessee Supreme Court reversed the finding that prompted Wells to write letters to the newspapers in Memphis and later to African American newspapers about the lack of justice for Blacks.⁵⁹ This court reversal was “in defiance of the 1875 Civil Rights Act that prohibited discrimination based on race, creed, or color in theaters, hotels, transports, and other public accommodations.”⁶⁰ Wells’ published work is extensive as she wrote about issues of race and gender, kept and published an ongoing log of acts of mob violence, and

⁵⁵ Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 4.

⁵⁶ Andrews, Foster, and Harris, *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*, 763.

⁵⁷ Andrews, Foster, and Harris, *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*, 763.

⁵⁸ Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1998), 126.

⁵⁹ Andrews, Foster, and Harris, *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*, 763.

⁶⁰ Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *On Lynchings* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2002), 5.

kept a diary describing her struggles as a single and professional woman.⁶¹ Some of Wells' early writings are captured in *Ida B. Wells: The Light of Truth – Writings of an Anti-Lynching Crusader*.

Stick to the Race – 1885

Functions of Leadership – 1885

Freedom of Political Action – 1885

Woman's Mission – 1885

A Story of 1900 – 1886

Iola' on Discrimination – 1887

Our Women – 1887

The Model Woman – 1888

The Jim Crow Car – 1891

All Things Considered – 1891

The Lynchers Wince – 1891

The Requisites of True Leadership – 1892.⁶²

The Curve Lynchings

Wells' introduction into her work with anti-lynching formally began with the lynching of three of her friends, Thomas Moss, Will Stewart, and Calvin McDowell, in 1892.⁶³ Wells was close friends with the Moss family and wrote of Thomas as “[an]

⁶¹ Andrews, Foster, and Harris, *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*, 763.

⁶² Ida B. Wells, *The Light of Truth: Writings of an Anti-Lynching Crusader*, 1-41.

exemplary young man, he was married and the father of one little girl, Maurine, whose godmother I was. He and his wife Betty were the best friends I had in town.”⁶⁴ The three victims were Black businessmen in Memphis who owned and operated the People’s Grocery in Memphis’s “Curve” section. The grocery store “had been organized by some of the city’s most prominent [B]lack capitalists and socialites.”⁶⁵ The success of this local grocery store drew the attention and ire of the white owner of Barnett’s Grocery, W. R. Barnett, who instigated physical violence.⁶⁶ The Black community held a meeting to address these violent acts. In retaliation, Barrett convinced a Shelby County grand jury and the county’s criminal court judge to charge the owners of the People’s Grocery for maintaining a nuisance accusing them of conspiring against whites.⁶⁷ After that, Barrett sent someone to inform the Black grocers that a white mob was planning to raze their store. When “nine deputy sheriffs dressed in civilian clothing” arrived that night to deliver the arrest warrants, they were fired upon and mistaken for a mob.⁶⁸ While Black people scattered during the violence, the authorities arrested McDowell and Will Stewart on the spot. In contrast, Tom Moss was arrested during the roundups of Blacks around the city.⁶⁹ In addition to arresting all suspected rioters, the local judge took unlawful

⁶³ Lisa A. White, “The Curve Lynchings: Violence, Politics, Economics, and Race Rhetoric in 1890s Memphis Tennessee,” *Historical Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (Spring: 2005), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42628561>.

⁶⁴ Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 47.

⁶⁵ David M. Tucker, “Miss Ida B. Wells and Memphis Lynching,” *Phylon* 32, no. 2 (2nd Qtr. Summer 1971), 112-122, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/273997>.

⁶⁶ Tucker, “Miss Ida B. Wells and Memphis Lynching,” 115.

⁶⁷ Tucker, “Miss Ida B. Wells and Memphis Lynching,” 115.

⁶⁸ Tucker, “Miss Ida B. Wells and Memphis Lynching,” 115.

⁶⁹ Tucker, “Miss Ida B. Wells and Memphis Lynching,” 116.

action to remove the accessible weapons of the Black community by confiscating the arms of the Tennessee Rifles company, a Black state militia company.⁷⁰

Instead of allowing the court to work for justice, a mob of “masked men” stormed the jail, took the three grocery owners, and lynched them.⁷¹ “Nine white men . . . took the prisoners a mile north of the jail and shot them in cold blood on a vacant lot next to the Chesapeake and Ohio tracks.”⁷² According to Wells, one of the white-run papers reported the details of their deaths.⁷³

It is said that Tom Moss begged for his life for the sake of his wife and child and his unborn baby; that when asked if he had anything to say, told them to ‘tell my people to go West — there is no justice for them here;’ that Calvin McDowell got hold of one of the guns of the lynchers and because they could not loosen the grip a shot was fired into his closed fist. When the three bodies were found, the fingers of McDowell’s right hand had been shot to pieces and his eyes were gouged out. This proved that the one who wrote that news report was either an eyewitness or got the facts from someone who was.⁷⁴

The funerals of these three men invigorated this Black community into action by recommending emigration for the Blacks of Memphis.⁷⁵

As many as two thousand [B]lack Memphians may have fled the city not only in search of freedom for their children but with the vague hope that depopulating the area would cause the whites to regret their violent oppression of [B]lack people.⁷⁶

This community of Black people grieved the losses of Moss and McDowell and gathered around the Curve to vent the frustrations of their deaths. Because of this, the county judge

⁷⁰ Tucker, “Miss Ida B. Wells and Memphis Lynching,” 116.

⁷¹ White, *The Curve Lynchings*, 45.

⁷² Tucker, *Miss Ida B. Wells and Memphis Lynching*, 115.

⁷³ Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 50.

⁷⁴ Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 50.

⁷⁵ Tucker, “Miss Ida B. Wells and Memphis Lynching,” 116.

⁷⁶ Tucker, “Miss Ida B. Wells and Memphis Lynching,” 116.

ordered the sheriff to “take a hundred men, go to the Curve at once, and shoot down on sight any Negro who appears to be making trouble.”⁷⁷ Upon hearing this order, the white men broke into hardware stores, armed themselves, and obeyed the judge’s orders, shooting into any group of Black people they saw.⁷⁸ The white mob broke into the People’s Grocery and destroyed the inventory while eating what they could, and a few days later, the creditors took over and sold the rest of the stock at auction.⁷⁹ Unfortunately, Wells was in Mississippi during the riots and would never see the burial of her good friend. Still, she penned an editorial that reached Memphis and the world in her newspaper, the *Memphis Free Speech*.⁸⁰

The city of Memphis has demonstrated that neither character nor standing avails the Negro if he dares to protect himself against the white man or become his rival . . . There is nothing we can do about lynching now, as we are outnumbered and without arms. The white mob could help itself to ammunition without pay, but the order was rigidly enforced against the selling of guns to Negroes. There is therefore only one thing left that we can do; save our money and leave a town which will neither protect our lives and property, nor give us a fair trial in the courts, but takes us out and murders us in cold blood when accused by white persons.⁸¹

These lynchings could not have happened at a worse time for Memphis because the city was amidst a public revitalization campaign that would take Memphis from a “hard-drinking and hard-fighting town” to a modern manufacturing and transportation city.⁸² In addition, whites were determined to limit the political power that Blacks held

⁷⁷ Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 51.

⁷⁸ Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 51.

⁷⁹ Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 51.

⁸⁰ Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 52.

⁸¹ Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 52.

⁸² White, *The Curve Lynchings*, 46.

post-Reconstruction.⁸³ “According to the 1890 census, only 35% of the population who lived in the voting wards of Memphis were American-born whites. In contrast, 44.5% was Black, and 20.5% was foreign-born.”⁸⁴ Black voters were a viable threat to white supremacy in Memphis, and Wells shed light on the Curve Lynchings from the United States to England, staining the reputation of Memphis.⁸⁵

In response to this latest mob violence in the mass exodus of Black people, a group of Black and white residents attempted to find common ground and address the race problem by penning a resolution condemning riots and lynching that was supposed to get Blacks to stay in the Memphis area.⁸⁶

In response, the White business community began to petition Blacks not to leave or to come back to Memphis with statements like, ‘People in this part of the country like the negro. They give him credit for being an excellent workman, and they do not want him to go.’⁸⁷

The Curve Lynchings also created additional problems for Memphis: (1) the three Black men who were hanged were successful business owners and not rapists; (2) the business leaders were trying to revitalize Memphis; and (3) the fault for the race riot was vague – even an independent white newspaper, the *Nashville Banner*, identified W. R. Barrett as the initiator.⁸⁸

⁸³ White, *The Curve Lynchings*, 46.

⁸⁴ White, *The Curve Lynchings*, 46.

⁸⁵ White, *The Curve Lynchings*, 46.

⁸⁶ White, *The Curve Lynchings*, 47.

⁸⁷ White, *The Curve Lynchings*, 47.

⁸⁸ White, *The Curve Lynchings*, 46.

At twenty years old, Wells, the outspoken journalist, was compelled to launch the “first effective anti-lynching campaign.”⁸⁹ Wells’ editorial on the Curve Lynching is as follows:

The good colored citizens of Memphis who have been interested in and worked for the prosperity and success of the city; who stood by the white people when the plague of ’78 and ’79 threatened to sweep the town from the face of the earth, demand that the murderers of Calvin McDowell, Will Stewart and Tom Moss be brought to justice. We ask this in the name of God and in the name of the law we have always obeyed and upheld and intend to uphold and obey in the future.⁹⁰

Wells’ life was threatened after she published an article in the May 21 *Memphis Free Speech* editorial where she disputed the rationale that whites had that Black men were only being hanged because they were rapists accused of rape.⁹¹ Wells took it even further by saying,

Nobody in this section of the country believes the old threadbare lies that Negro men rape white women. If Southern white men are not careful, they will overreach themselves and public sentiment will have a reaction, or a conclusion will be reached which will be very damaging to the moral reputation of their women.⁹²

This article was the catalyst for the battle between the white and Black newspapers concerning anti-lynching, with the *Memphis Scimitar* replying, “Unless the Negroes promptly applied the remedy it would be the duty of the whites to tie the author to a stake, brand him on the forehead and perform a surgical operation on him with a pair of shears.”⁹³ The writer thought Wells was her male business manager at the *Memphis Free*

⁸⁹ White, *The Curve Lynchings*, 45.

⁹⁰ Tucker, “Miss Ida B. Wells and Memphis Lynching,” 112-122.

⁹¹ Tucker, “Miss Ida B. Wells and Memphis Lynching,” 117.

⁹² Tucker, “Miss Ida B. Wells and Memphis Lynching,” 117.

⁹³ Tucker, “Miss Ida B. Wells and Memphis Lynching,” 117.

Speech paper.⁹⁴ There were more threatening comments than in the *Memphis Commercial*. Another white-run newspaper wrote: “There are some things the Southern white man will not tolerate, and the obscene intimations of the foregoing have brought the writer to the outermost limit of public patience.”⁹⁵ Wells, however, did not shrink from her writings even with threats of mutilation and murder.⁹⁶

Lynch law had become commonplace in 1892, and Wells was determined to get out the word about this atrocious act upon Black people.⁹⁷ Her anti-lynching work inspired the *New York Times* to call her “a slanderous and nasty-minded mulatress.”⁹⁸ With Well’s disgust over the Curve Lynchings and her inability to return to the South, fearing bodily harm, “she would attack the entire structure of southern white supremacy by focusing on its most barbaric manifestation, lynching.”⁹⁹

Marriage, Children, and Anti-lynching Work

The threats and acts of violence on her property did not deter Wells from this critical work.¹⁰⁰ Neither marriage nor children stopped her from achieving a voice in the anti-lynching arena as she continued to write and contribute to her husband Ferdinand L.

⁹⁴ Tucker, “Miss Ida B. Wells and Memphis Lynching,” 117.

⁹⁵ Tucker, “Miss Ida B. Wells and Memphis Lynching,” 117.

⁹⁶ Jean M. Lutes, “Lynching Coverage and the American Reporter-Novelist,” *American Literary History* 19, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 456-481, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4496993>.

⁹⁷ Tucker, “Miss Ida B. Wells and Memphis Lynching,” 118.

⁹⁸ Lutes, “Lynching Coverage and the American Reporter-Novelist,” 456

⁹⁹ Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 56.

¹⁰⁰ Collins, *On Lynching*, 5.

Barnett's newspaper, the *Chicago Conservator*.¹⁰¹ Wells had four children with Barnett and continued her activism despite the duties of nursing babies.¹⁰² With the birth of her second son, Wells decided to resign from her full-time position at the *Chicago Conservator* and responsibilities.¹⁰³

I felt then, and still feel, that if the mother does not have the training and control of her child's early and most plastic years, she will never gain that control. I had already found that motherhood was a profession by itself, just like school-teaching and lecturing. She owed it to herself to become as expert as possible in the practice of her profession.¹⁰⁴

Wells would author two more pamphlets on anti-lynching: *A Red Record: Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynching in the United States in 1895* and *Mob Rule in New Orleans in 1900*.¹⁰⁵ *The Red Record* chronicled the lynchings of Black people and their causes.¹⁰⁶ During slavery, the bodies of Black men were worth the white enslaver's investment; however, after Reconstruction, there was no value to the body of a freed slave.¹⁰⁷ "While slaves were scourged mercilessly, and in countless cases inhumanly treated in other respects, still the white owner rarely permitted his anger to go so far as to take a life, which would entail upon him a loss of several hundred dollars."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰¹ Collins, *On Lynching*, 5.

¹⁰² Ida B. Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 249.

¹⁰³ Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 249.

¹⁰⁴ Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 250-251.

¹⁰⁵ Collins, *On Lynching*, 5.

¹⁰⁶ Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *The Red Record: Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynching in the United States* (Kindle Locations 4-5), February 8, 2005, <https://gutenberg.org/ebooks/14977>.

¹⁰⁷ Wells-Barnett, *The Red Record*, 5.

¹⁰⁸ Wells-Barnett, *The Red Record*, 5.

When Black bodies held no value, it was easy for white people to kill them.¹⁰⁹ “In freedom, a new system of intimidation came into vogue; The Negro was not only whipped and scourged; he was killed.”¹¹⁰

On January 1, 1894, Wells published the statistics of the lynchings of Black people in the *Chicago Tribune*.¹¹¹ Blacks were hanged for all types of acts:

Arson, suspected robbery, assault, attempted assault, rape, incendiarism, burglary, wife-beating, attempted burglary, race prejudice, thieves, alleged barn burning, alleged murder, alleged complicity in murder, murder, self-defense, poisoning wells, alleged well poisoning, insulting whites, murderous assault, no offense, alleged raped, alleged stock poisoning, suspected murder, suspicion of rape, turning states evidence, and rape totaling 159 lynchings.¹¹²

In 1892, 241 people, including women and children, were lynched; 106 were Black.¹¹³

“The years between the end of Reconstruction and the 1920s, [saw] ‘spectacle lynchings’ before great crowds, often involving drawn-out torture, mutilation, burning, and the dismemberment of the victim’s body occurred regularly in the New South.”¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ Wells-Barnett, *The Red Record*, 5.

¹¹⁰ Wells-Barnett, *The Red Record*, 5.

¹¹¹ Wells-Barnett, *The Red Record*, 13.

¹¹² Wells-Barnett, *The Red Record*, 13-18.

¹¹³ Wells-Barnett, *The Red Record*, 18.

¹¹⁴ Manfred Berg, *Popular Justice: A History of Lynching in America* (Boulder, CO, New York, NY: and London, UK: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011), 91.

Anti-Lynching Work Continued

Wells was celebrated by some and demonized by others.¹¹⁵ For example, in an advertisement for one of Wells' lectures in the *Washington Bee*, Wells was celebrated:

As a platform orator, Miss Wells takes high and commanding rank as an earnest and eloquent speaker. No woman of the Race has greater power than she possesses to hold the attention of an audience.¹¹⁶

In a public address before the women of New York City and Brooklyn at Lyric Hall in New York, October 5, 1892, Wells moved the vast assemblage to tears by the pathetic recital of the terrible lynching of three of her friends at Memphis, in March 1892, and the forced suspicion of her newspaper.¹¹⁷ *The New York Sun* quotes Wells on Black people's dire situation faced on July 30, 1894.¹¹⁸

I am glad that the colored people of the land are beginning to appreciate the gravity of the situation. As it was said long ago, and it is also true of our Race, heredity bondsmen must strike the first blow for freedom themselves. It is constantly being thrown in the negro's face that he was set at liberty by white men. But is the Negro free to-day? No, he is not. The outside world thinks that with Lincoln's emancipation proclamation and Congress's three amendments to that measure the colored people were made as free as their white brethren. But this is not so. For thirty years this has not been so in the South, although every effort to remedy things have been made.¹¹⁹

The English also supported Wells and the Black People of America,

They could not believe that bands of men after lynching a negro would actually stand around the suspended body and have a photograph of the group taken, until

¹¹⁵ *The Washington Bee*, "Miss Ida B. Wells: A Lecture," October 29, 1892, image 3, Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers, 1884-1922, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, 1892, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84025891/1892-10-29/ed-1/seq-3/>.

¹¹⁶ *The Washington Bee*, "Miss Ida B. Wells: A Lecture."

¹¹⁷ *The Washington Bee*, "Miss Ida B. Wells: A Lecture."

¹¹⁸ *The Washington Bee*, "Miss Ida B. Wells: A Lecture."

¹¹⁹ "Ida B. Wells Here: She Urges the Negroes of America to Organize," July 30, 1894, page 2, image 2, *The Sun* in Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030272/1894-07-30/ed-1/seq-2/>.

I showed the photographs I had in my possession. Then they said that it was high time that the Negro got out and told these things himself, and they invited me to come back again, which I did last winter when I spent four months travelling around England.¹²⁰

Wells traveled to speak at churches, and the Liverpool and London churches “threw open their doors to me and gave me the opportunity to tell them of the terrible brutalities that were being inflicted.”¹²¹ Likewise, many detractors on the other side defended the practices of lynching like Speaker Crisp writing in the *Sun*,

Sometimes the crimes against women and little girls may be so outrageous that the people rise up and lynch the criminal, be he black or white . . . It sometimes happens that the crimes committed are so revolting that the people cannot restrain themselves and wait for even-handed justice to deal with the offender.¹²²

Another lynching defender, Mr. H. L. Wilson, commented,

Ida Wells may have deceived some few uninformed people in England regarding the character of southern womanhood, but by the people of America, who, without regard to sectional lines, have always cheerfully joined in a just tribute to the virtue and excellence of the Southern matron, her statements can only be received with discredit and scorn.¹²³

The Hawaiian Gazette quoted Wells in a speech to her listeners in England,

We want the colored Race to be placed in the proper light. The lawless lynchings in the South for alleged crimes against the whites are in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred simple outrages against our Race. The press is in control of the whites. It is our duty to see that every story published from the South, in which some negro is accused of some fiendish act and lynched for it, is run down by our own and detectives, if necessary, and the other side of it published. There are two sides to every lynching.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Ida B. Wells Here,” 2.

¹²¹ Ida B. Wells Here,” 2.

¹²² Ida B. Wells Here,” 2.

¹²³ Ida B. Wells Here,” 2.

¹²⁴ “A Plea For Her Race: Miss Ida B. Wells, Agitator Against Negro Lynching, Speaks,” August 21, 1894, page 6, image 6, *Hawaiian Gazette* in *Chronicling American: Historic American Newspapers*, 6, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83025121/1894-08-21/ed-1/seq-6/>.

Wells-Barnett's life's work is so extensive that it would take many more pages to do her justice. Here are just a few more of her accomplishments. In 1896, The National Association of Colored Women formed its organization around Wells' anti-lynching. However, she was never asked into leadership because she was less educated and not part of the elite.¹²⁵ In 1909, Wells was a founding member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).¹²⁶ Even though Wells began the anti-lynching campaign by which the NAACP was founded, her name was left off the executive committee list by W.E.B. Dubois.¹²⁷ In 1910, Wells-Barnett founded and became the first president of the Negro Fellowship League, which helped newly arrived Blacks from the South find employment.¹²⁸ When Black women refused to join the White Women's Suffrage Association, Wells founded an all-Black woman's suffrage group in Chicago in 1914 called the Alpha Suffrage Club.¹²⁹

In 1918 and 1919, the report of the Woman's Convention demanded the congressional passage of anti-lynching legislation

and implored every Black American stand with the NAACP in the fight against lynch law: 'Let 15,000,000 Negroes line up with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Any man who is not a member of that organization stands with the mob. There is no middle ground.'¹³⁰

¹²⁵ Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 10.

¹²⁶ Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 321.

¹²⁷ Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 321-329.

¹²⁸ Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 330.

¹²⁹ Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 345.

¹³⁰ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: and London, UK: Harvard University Press), 224.

In 1920, with the help of Wells, Women's Suffrage was ratified, and Black women became a force in the political arena.¹³¹ Wells never stopped fighting for the rights of Black people, as evidenced by her work which only ended with her death on March 14, 1931.¹³²

Conclusion

Ms. Ida B. Wells was a fearless woman whose ingenuity and resolve helped bring attention to the plight of Black people and spearheaded the anti-lynching campaign. Wells was a product of the time wherein she lived along with enduring her parents' experiences, who went from being enslaved to free after the Civil War. Her education, resilience, and care for the well-being of Black people drove her to stand up in the face of much adversity and murderous intent. Wells-Barnett continues to be a role model for Black women to live purposeful lives by using everything they have suffered to better their communities. In her earlier writings, Wells talked about the difficulty of being a Black female journalist and activist in a white and male-dominated society.¹³³

Like Rizpah (2 Sm 21:10-14), who came into her prophetic role as mother and guardian to her dead sons, Wells was compelled to take on an anti-lynching campaign because of the death of her friends. Wells' prophetic actions catalyzed many groups and organizations fighting to abolish Lynch Law. It was not only her heritage but also her innate yearning to protect Black people that facilitated Blacks' progress in the United

¹³¹ Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore and Thomas J. Sugrue, *These United States: A Nation in the Making: 1890 to the Present* (New York, NY: and London, UK: W. W. Norton and Company, 2015), 145.

¹³² Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 326.

¹³³ Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 323-4.

States. It was Rizpah's actions that compelled King David to honor Saul and his family with a decent burial, and it was Wells' work that led to a public apology in 2005 from Congress to Wells, which finally admitted that it had taken too long to eradicate Lynch Law. This public declaration was enacted in "A resolution (S. Res. 39) apologizing to the victims of lynching and the descendants of those victims for the failure of the Senate to enact anti-lynching legislation."¹³⁴

Hearing about Wells' life story and what she accomplished on behalf of others will help to inspire Black women in their activism efforts. Wells' women's clubs and organizations were instrumental in elevating Black women in the political realm, providing access to funding resources and educational programs that helped equalize Black communities. Programming geared towards women, by women sharing history and stories, and financial and educational resources can encourage Black women, once marginalized, to do meaningful work like Wells. Through such programming, not only will children be protected, but entire communities will benefit from women's innate power to protect and empower their communities.

¹³⁴ Congress.Gov, "Apologizing to Lynching Victims and Their Descendants," Congressional Record Vol. 151, No. 77 (Senate - June 13, 2005), <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record/2005/06/13/senate-section/article/S6364-3>.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter examines Womanist theology, which supports my project *Encouraging Black Women to Embrace Their Legacy of Prophetic Activism by Sharing Prophetic Women's Faith Stories*. "The study of theology is by definition the quest for the ultimate truth about God, about ourselves, and about the world we live in."¹ Womanist theology was birthed out of Black women's experiences and was created from Alice Walker's definition of "womanish" in her book *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*.² The grounded nature of womanist theology makes this theology even more critical to my work based on Black women's experiences. Furthermore, because theology is not only general but also "personal concerning gender, race, cultural heritage, religious background, and other factors,"³ womanist theology proves to be a great theology that supports Black women and their endeavors to live Godly lives.

¹ Larry D. Hart, *Truth Aflame: Theology for the Church in Renewal* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 13.

² Katie Canon, *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (New York, NY: Continuum, 1998), 23.

³ Hart, *Truth Aflame*, 15.

Womanist theology is a “theology as articulated by women of color and a way for them to claim their roots, define themselves, embrace and consciously affirm their cultural and religious traditions as well as their own embodiment through [structures] of oppression.”⁴ It is also a systematic theology which “takes what the Bible teaches and relates it to contemporary questions and knowledge to help people obey the scriptures, encourage worship and the proclamation of God.”⁵

Four primary areas of interest in this chapter are first, the theological themes of liberation within Womanist theology, including Alice Walker’s first works where the term womanism was conceived, and Stacey Floyd-Thomas’ expansion on Walker’s four-part definition of a womanist is highlighted. Second, it explores the theological issues related to this project involving orthopraxis, theodicy, and epistemology. Third, it examines the theological relevance of the subject and why it is important to Black women. Fourth, it will highlight the theological engagement, including some key figures in womanism and newer voices within the Womanist sphere.

Theological Theme

Novelist and poet Alice Walker first birthed the term “womanist” in 1979 in her short story “Coming Apart,” published in Laura Lederer’s anthology *Take Back the Night*.⁶ Walker writes of her female subject, “The wife has never considered herself a

⁴ Donald K. McKim, *The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, Second Edition, Revised and Expanded (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 345.

⁵ Hart, *Truth Aflame*, 17.

⁶ Layla Philips, ed., *The Womanist Reader* (New York, NY: and London, UK: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), xix.

feminist – though she is, of course, a ‘womanist.’ A ‘womanist’ is a feminist, only more common.”⁷ Thus, Walker made feminism more accessible to every day women who could not access the academically-born feminist movement.⁸ Through this new term, womanism, Black women and others had a pathway to talk about the “relationship between women, social change, the struggle against oppression, and the quest for full humanity.”⁹

In 1981 in Walker’s book review “Gifts of Power: The Writings of Rebecca Jackson,”¹⁰ and then in 1983, in her book *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose*, Walker continued with the naming and fleshing out of the term womanist.¹¹ Walker was not a theologian; however, she was vocal about what she saw missing in feminist theology so much so that her term for womanist caught the eye of theologians who felt a void in the theological landscape that did not speak to Black women.¹² Moreover, “[Walker’s] symbolic crafting of an all-encompassing definition was philosophically medicinal.”¹³

The definition of womanist, according to its creator, is

1. From *womanish*. (Opp. of “girlish,” i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, ‘you acting womanish,’ i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous, or *willful* behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered ‘good’ for one. Interested in grown up

⁷ Philips, *The Womanist Reader*, xix.

⁸ Philips, *The Womanist Reader*, xix.

⁹ Philips, *The Womanist Reader*, xx.

¹⁰ Philips, *The Womanist Reader*, xx.

¹¹ Cannon, *Katie’s Canon*, 23.

¹² Cannon, *Katie’s Canon*, 23.

¹³ Cannon, *Katie’s Canon*, 23.

doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: 'You trying to be grown.' Responsible. In charge. *Serious*.

2. *Also*: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually.

Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally a universalist, as in: 'Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige and black?' Ans. 'Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented.' Traditionally capable, as in: 'Mama, I'm walking to Canada and I'm taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me.' Reply: 'It wouldn't be the first time.'

3. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. *Loves* the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. *Loves* the Folk. Loves herself. *Regardless*.

4. Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.¹⁴

Theologians now use this four-part definition of womanist as a "critical, methodological framework for challenging inherited traditions for their collusion with androcentric patriarchy as well as a catalyst in overcoming oppressive situations through revolutionary acts of rebellion."¹⁵ It speaks for Black women and it is a lens that allows them to discuss their faith and everyday lives.¹⁶ Womanist theology is not about exclusion or inclusion into the dominant culture's world; instead, it is a world or garden unto itself.¹⁷ The entire life cycle of African-American women's lives is essential to womanism as it observes race, sex, and class constructs and evaluates the evils of the past so they will not be repeated.¹⁸

¹⁴ Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (New York, NY: Mariners Books, 2003), xi.

¹⁵ Cannon, *Katie's Canon*, 23.

¹⁶ Cannon, *Katie's Canon*, 24.

¹⁷ Cannon, *Katie's Canon*, 24.

¹⁸ Cannon, *Katie's Canon*, 24.

Stacey Floyd-Thomas takes Walker's four-part definition of Womanist theology and expands it further for women who continue to be marginalized and need a liberating voice. Floyd-Thomas' four-part definition begins with "Radical Subjectivity," taken from a part of Walker's definition of being womanish, "Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or *willful* behavior."¹⁹

Radical Subjectivity

Radical Subjectivity is "speaking truth to power and requires that we re-image a victim into a person who is victorious over her circumstances and often takes place in the preached sermon for the listener."²⁰ "Radical Subjectivity expresses a woman's ability to affirm her authentic self despite battling forces of oppression. It is a journey toward identity formation, self-love, and valuing self. It also speaks to how women can subvert domination."²¹ "Women who come face-to-face with patriarchy and other forms of oppression can reach deep within themselves in a manner that affirms self and then change their situation or at least change their perception of their situation demonstrate radical subjectivity and create agency."²²

¹⁹ Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, xi.

²⁰ Kimberly P. Johnson, *The Womanist Preacher: Proclaiming Womanist Rhetoric from the Pulpit* (Minneapolis, MN: Lexington Books, 2017), 13.

²¹ Johnson, *The Womanist Preacher*, 14.

²² Johnson, *The Womanist Preacher*, 15.

The fruit of Radical Subjectivity shows up via the preached Word of God and in the academy, where Black women must stand up against the systematic patriarchy and misogyny inflicted on them because of their methodological differences.²³

Within learned institutions, structured academic amnesia is relentless. Intellectual rank and scholarly authority are assessed as unalterable, fixed, mechanical phenomena. When Womanists refuse to play the game of illusive objectivity, a game that is incapable of tolerating ambiguity, ignores emotions, weeds out passion, resists spontaneity, maintains rigid predictability, and celebrates the isolated solo-self, then the prescriptive authorities impose theoretical frameworks categorizing our truth as a lie. Each and every time that we are not willing to dissect people, places, and things; that we stand over against the intellectual propensity to tear apart foundational experiences, meanings, and elements by way of suprarational technical, abstract, referential facts, then we get demoted to the status of second-class thinkers.²⁴

Radical Subjectivity also shows up within the everyday lives of Black women in their relationships and their communities, as illustrated by RevSisRaedorah, who talks about the strength of Black women in her poem “When Mama was God” [Excerpt].²⁵

When mama was God, She made miracles happen
 In the middle of a Houston ghetto
 The center of my universe, indeed.
 She walked on water
 In three inch heels, matching bag
 With us five kids in her footsteps.
 When mama was God She laid hands on us
 So the cops wouldn't and trifling men couldn't
 Healing bad attitudes and broken hearts.
 She stood her ground with white folk
 Those blue-eyed devils of pure evil
 Of the 60s . . . 80s . . . this new millennium.
 She made a dollar hollah
 On the occasions of more month than money

²³ Katie G. Cannon, “Structured Academia Amnesia: As if this True Womanist Story Never Happened,” in *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism In Religion and Society* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006), 26.

²⁴ Cannon, *Structured Academia Amnesia*, 26.

²⁵ RevSisRaedorah, “When Mama Was God,” in *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism In Religion and Society*, ed. Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006), 17-18.

Without robbing anyone of anything.
 When mama was God She blessed two fish and five loaves
 Or was that gov'm't cheese And canned mystery meat?
 She prayed for us and others
 We eavesdropped listening for our name to be called
 Knowing that no weapon formed against us would prosper.
 When mama was God.
 'Girl, you just like your mama,' somebody said one day when I was feeling a
 whole lot like God.²⁶

Traditional Communalism

According to Floyd-Thomas, the second tenet of womanist theology is “Traditional Communalism.” This tenet pays homage to Black women’s relationships – individually and corporately.²⁷ “In illustrating a spirit of traditional communalism, the work of Womanist ethicists encompasses not only the personal story of individual women; it also takes into account the various gifts, identities, and concerns of [B]lack people in general to use every resource available to strengthen the community as a whole.”²⁸

The affirmation of the loving connections and relational bonds formed by Black women — including familial, maternal, platonic, religious, sexual, and spiritual ties. Black women’s ability to create, re-member, nurture, protect, sustain, and liberate communities which are marked and measured not by those outside of one’s own community but by the acts of inclusivity, mutuality, reciprocity, and self-care practiced within it (opposite of the biological deterministic assumption that a woman’s role is to serve as nurturer and protector).²⁹

²⁶ RevSisRaedorah, *When Mama Was God*, 17-18.

²⁷ Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism In Religion and Society* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006), 78.

²⁸ Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode: Methods in Womanist Ethics* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2006), 9.

²⁹ Floyd-Thomas, *Deeper Shades of Purple*, 78.

Traditional communalism beckons Black women to their ancestors, and in this remembrance can support Black women through the troubles of “internalized oppression (colorism) and self-deception (exceptionalism) and reestablishes a sense of self-awareness, collective memory, and communal pride.”³⁰ Communalism, in this context, is understood through “solidarity, honor, and character.”³¹ It is honored through the words of poetry like “Reflecting\Black”:

sometimes i feel myself liking black people
 my people
 the way they smooth things up with spirit leaking from their bodies
 making laughter with their feet and flooding it with sea-water tears
 sometimes i feel myself liking black people
 my people
 for making love out of agony
 for daring to feel pleasure inside aching black skins
 for bending low with joy erupting in their bellies
 performing miracles with Trickster Rituals
 sometimes i feel myself liking black people
 my people
 for knowing when to hit the right key string
 speed of wind
 for knowing when to pause so that beats echo
 with the pulses of black bodies
 with the rhythms of black memory
 so that beats
 laugh
 linger with emotional clarity
 for making scat-sounds talk with good feeling
 like silky~jazz~tones
 rolling off strings
 keys sun-dried goatskins
 sometimes i feel myself liking black people
 my people
 for wailing while they sing
 for trapping ecstasy with whispers of pain and hope
 for claiming space among enemies with collective rhythm

³⁰ Floyd-Thomas, *Deeper Shades of Purple*, 78.

³¹ Diana M. Stewart, “Dancing Limbo: Black Passages through the Boundaries of Place, Race, Class, and Religion,” in *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, ed. Stacey Floyd-Thomas (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006), 83.

free unfettered rhythm
 Yes
 i like my people
 making culture out of contradiction
 descending into the habits of blue-nights
 burying sorrow
 resurrecting shadows of chaos
 reflecting hope

 remembering souls
 lingering souls³²

Redemptive Self-Love

Through this tenet, women are described as having great esteem for themselves despite “not knowing where to be, and not knowing how to claim [my] space.”³³

“Redemptive Self-love reflects the ability to unashamedly love self and stand up for self regardless of what anyone else thinks.”³⁴ This third tenet, also identified as “virtue ethics,” views this principle of self-love as identity politics and self-actualization.³⁵ The dialogue about Black women’s lives in womanism is how self-actualization bears fruit for Black women.³⁶

This dialogue, first and foremost, reminds me from whom I receive my wisdom: from my mama and all of those other black women not necessarily in the academy — those everyday women who sit in the pews of black churches on Sunday morning looking for the sustenance to carry on during the week. These are the women who supply womanist religious scholars with the substance of our work. They are the resources of our knowledge about God and the meaning of God for

³² Dianne M. Stewart, “Reflecting\Black,” in *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism In Religion and Society*, ed. Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006), 80-81.

³³ Kelly Brown Douglas, “Twenty Years a Womanist An Affirming Challenge,” in *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism In Religion and Society*, ed. Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006), 145.

³⁴ Johnson, *The Womanist Preacher*, 59.

³⁵ Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode*, 33.

³⁶ Douglas, *Twenty Years a Womanist*, 147.

black women and men in struggle. It is their faith that provides the foundation of our womanist theological claims. It is from out of their experiences of crafting a life for themselves and their families that our theological questions and even answers come. Essentially, the womanist dialogue makes clear that it is these everyday women, the ‘mamas,’ within the black church community who have ‘epistemological privilege.’³⁷

Black women are valued over and against the stereotypes that say they are not enough culturally, physically, or spiritually.³⁸ While much of Black women’s experience has been oppressive and painful, the power of creativity and love has emerged amid the complexities of evil and suffering. Wisdom has been gained from the spiritual power of creating beauty out of ugliness, celebrating life amid suffering, and walking in love amid hate.³⁹ Womanist theology is relational in this tenet, showing how Black women have “overcome, gone through and kept from being stuck.”⁴⁰

You have worked and prayed and begged and threatened through slave rebellion, reconstruction, and civil rights. You sang, you mourned; you were mother, daughter, sister. The tribe of your family with more extensions than any hairdo. Some can’t spell college; some have a Ph.D. You sit at the welcome table; you are prostitute; you’re complex. You have instigated, ruminated: many thousands gone.⁴¹

³⁷ Douglas, *Twenty Years a Womanist*, 147.

³⁸ Floyd-Thomas, *Deeper Shades of Purple*, 141.

³⁹ Karen Fletcher Baker, “The Womanist Journey,” in *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism In Religion and Society*, ed. Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006), 158.

⁴⁰ Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan, “Quilting Relations with Creation Overcoming, Going Through, and Not Being Stuck,” in *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism In Religion and Society*, ed. Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006), 176.

⁴¹ Kirk-Duggan, *Quilting Relations with Creation*, 176.

Critical Engagement

The fourth and last tenet is Critical Engagement which addresses the intersectionality of Womanist theology.⁴² Womanist theology has grown over the past years, growing out of Alice Walker's definition of womanism; however, her own religious and ethical beliefs have not been central to the teaching of Womanist Theology in the academy.⁴³ Walker, a pagan, expressed her religion in her writings, yet in womanist theology, it was eliminated in favor of a Christian lens.⁴⁴ Through its growth process, womanists have disputed the meaning of the term womanist through this oversight and many other omissions.⁴⁵

For some a 'womanist' is a 'black feminist,' as defined in Alice Walker. Many, however, insist that 'womanists' should and have moved beyond Walker's definition. Some others share the concern that none of us are strictly tied to Walker's early definition of 1983. Women scholars of religion who want to emphasize connection with global feminists and also with 'White American' feminists [some] continue to define 'womanist' as a 'Black feminist' or 'feminist of color.'⁴⁶

Many other theologies have been birthed out of Walker's definition of Womanism. Some are covered in the Theological Engagement section of this chapter.

⁴² Floyd-Thomas, *Deeper Shades of Purple*, 208.

⁴³ Melanie L. Harris, "Womanist Humanism: A New Hermeneutic," in *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism In Religion and Society*, ed. Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006), 211.

⁴⁴ Harris, *Womanist Humanism*, 215.

⁴⁵ Karen Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God: The Trinity from a Womanist Perspective* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2006), 7.

⁴⁶ Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God*, 7.

Theological Issues

Epistemology and Orthopraxis

Womanist theology began in the academy in response to the void left by feminism.⁴⁷ “The women’s movement of the 1960s and 1970s primarily represented the interests of white, upper-middle-class, well-educated women from North America and Western Europe.”⁴⁸ The subsequent Second Wave of Feminism also did not address the needs of those who fell outside of their purview.⁴⁹ “Some of these feminists did not readily see the many diverse backgrounds from which women hail or acknowledge that those diverse backgrounds can lead to diverse experiences.”⁵⁰ The Third Wave of Feminism tried to address more diversity issues but still lacked what Black women needed.⁵¹ The progenitor of the term womanist, Alice Walker, compares feminist to womanist as lavender to purple, meaning womanism covers the unique experiences of Black women while feminism does not.⁵²

Those who claim to be a womanist must care about their individual or family’s lives and the entire community.⁵³ “Two concerns for the womanist is survival and

⁴⁷ Mary Veeneman, “Feminism and Womanism,” in *Christian Theologies of the Sacraments: A Comparative Introduction*, eds. Justin S. Holcomb and David A. Johnson (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2017), 360.

⁴⁸ Veeneman, *Christian Theologies*, 360.

⁴⁹ Veeneman, *Christian Theologies*, 360.

⁵⁰ Veeneman, *Christian Theologies*, 360.

⁵¹ Veeneman, *Christian Theologies*, 360.

⁵² Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*, xi.

⁵³ Veeneman, *Christian Theologies*, 360.

community building.”⁵⁴ Womanist theology seeks to elevate Black women’s, specifically African-American women’s, whole lives into the theological conversation.⁵⁵ Womanist theology follows the paths laid out by Alice Walker and the many Black women before her, like Sojourner Truth, who fought for justice for Black women, men, and children.⁵⁶

Black religious scholars chose to become womanists and changed the theological landscape for Black women.⁵⁷ While ushering in a new epistemology, it took the experience of Black women as prescriptive.⁵⁸ This epistemology derived not from the dominant culture’s perspective but from Black women’s moral, spiritual, and political perceptions.⁵⁹ “This self-avowed standpoint sought to do away with Black women forever feeling forced to be caretakers or surrogates to white men, white women, or Black men by dismantling white and patriarchal powers that compromised Black women’s integrity and self-determination.”⁶⁰ Thus, the orthopraxy in Womanist theology, which stresses the importance of actions concerned with the practical and the political, is steeped within the vast tradition of Black women’s lives.⁶¹

⁵⁴ Delores S. Williams, “Womanist Theology: Black Women’s Voices,” in *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader*, ed. Ursula King (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 77–78.

⁵⁵ Williams, *Womanist Theology*, 77-78.

⁵⁶ Floyd-Thomas, *Deeper Shades of Purple*, 3.

⁵⁷ Floyd-Thomas, *Deeper Shades of Purple*, 3.

⁵⁸ Floyd-Thomas, *Deeper Shades of Purple*, 3.

⁵⁹ Floyd-Thomas, *Deeper Shades of Purple*, 3.

⁶⁰ Floyd- Thomas, *Deeper Shades of Purple*, 3.

⁶¹ McKim, *Theological Terms*, 224.

Theodicy

Theodicy is defined as “the justification of a deity’s justice and goodness in light of suffering and evil is central to liberation.”⁶² “Theodicy is central because black theology [and thus Womanist Theology] defines itself as a theology of liberation. Accordingly, the special requirements of a theology of liberation necessitate consideration of the theodicy issue.”⁶³ At the crux of a theology of liberation is the problem of oppression which leads to suffering; therefore, theodicy must be engaged.⁶⁴ “The [Liberation] theologian is obliged to reconcile the inordinate amount of black suffering, which is implied in his claim that the black situation is oppressive, with his affirmations about the nature of God and God’s sovereignty over human history.”⁶⁵

Theological Relevance

In 1619, a small group of Africans was sold into slavery by a Dutchman in Jamestown, Virginia.⁶⁶ Since then,

America has been a hostile environment for people of African descent. Throughout the colonial period and the first century of this nation’s independence, Africans were defined by both popular opinion and the Constitution itself as only partially human. Hence, they were viewed as lacking the natural capacity for equal participation in the nation’s political, social, and religious life. The most insidious implication of this definition of Africans as partially human was their

⁶² McKim, *Theological Terms*, 316.

⁶³ Peter J. Paris and Julius Crump, *African American Theological Ethics: A Reader*, First edition (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 209.

⁶⁴ Paris and Crump, *African American Theological Ethics*, 209.

⁶⁵ Paris and Crump, *African American Theological Ethics*, 209.

⁶⁶ Paris and Crump, *African American Theological Ethics*, 209.

tacit removal from the moral realm. Thus, their oppressors felt themselves free from both law and conscience to treat them with impunity.⁶⁷

Womanist theology is necessary and relevant because of the construction of racism which is,

the set of institutional, cultural, and interpersonal patterns and practices that create advantages for people legally defined and socially constructed as ‘white,’ and the color disadvantages for people defined as belonging to racial groups that were not considered Whites by the dominant power structure in the United States.⁶⁸

Additionally, in the traditional sense, the oppression caused by the social construct of race “exercises tyranny by [the] ruling group”⁶⁹ and “names structural and systematic inequalities as problems to be addressed by social justice advocates.”⁷⁰ From racism comes a “social construction of reality which creates a hierarchy of privilege based on stereotypes”⁷¹ that, according to the novelist James Baldwin “have no significance outside systems of privilege and oppression in which they were created in the first place.”⁷² “Privilege exists when one group has something of value that is denied to others

⁶⁷ Paris and Crump, *African American Theological Ethics*, 209.

⁶⁸ Carmelita Rosie Casteneda and Ximena Zuniga, “Racism: Race as a Sociopolitical Construction,” in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*. Third ed., ed. Maurianne Adams (New York, NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), 58.

⁶⁹ Iris Marion Young, “Five Face of Oppression,” in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, Third ed., ed. Maurianne Adams (New York, NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), 36.

⁷⁰ Maurianne Adams, ed., *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice* (New York, NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), 2.

⁷¹ Allen G. Johnson, “The Social Construction of Difference,” in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, Third ed., ed. Maurianne Adams (New York, NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), 16.

⁷² Johnson, “The Social Construction of Difference,” 16.

simply because of the groups they belong to, rather than because of anything they've done or failed to do.”⁷³

Another reason why womanist theology is so important is because of misogyny which is,

The hatred of women particularly by men which feminists view as a source of oppression and patriarchy. '[This is a] system of power controlled by men whose defining elements are its male-dominated, male-identified, and male-centered character.' At its core, it is a set of symbols and ideas that make up a culture embodied by everything from the content of everyday conversation to literature and film.⁷⁴

This patriarchal culture “includes ideas about the nature of things, including men, women, and humanity, with manhood and masculinity most closely associated with being human and womanhood and femininity relegated to the marginal position of the other.”⁷⁵

Theological Engagement

In his book *Black Theology and Black Power*, James H. Cone began a new theological field that challenged the classical tradition of theological studies declaring that the “tradition was guilty of epistemological hegemony as seen by its ignorance, distortion, and devaluation of the religious traditions of oppressed African Americans.”⁷⁶ His work was followed by the creation of a methodological approach “to study Black

⁷³ Johnson, “The Social Construction of Difference,” 17.

⁷⁴ Allen G. Johnson, “Patriarchy, the System: An It, Not a He, a Them, or An Us,” in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, Third ed., ed. Maurianne Adams (New York, NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), 364.

⁷⁵ Johnson, “Patriarchy, the System,” 364.

⁷⁶ Paris and Crump, *African American Theological Ethics*, xvi.

religion that would do justice to its history and ongoing significance.”⁷⁷ In the 1980s, Black female Ph.D. students at Union Theological Seminary in New York City began to question the lack of Black women’s voices in Black male and white feminist theologies, thus giving birth to womanist studies which included perspectives from Black women.⁷⁸

Increasing numbers of African Americans were soon recognized for their creative productivity in the fields of biblical studies, history, homiletics, theology, ethics, Christian education, pastoral care, and sociology of religion. Those accomplishments along with the academic works of several other racial and ethnic minorities in the profession eventually resulted in a revolutionary change in the academic study of religion. Numerous diverse voices, long excluded from the mainstream of academic discourse, began the process of making their imprint on religious scholarship by challenging the cultural hegemony within the academy that had excluded them from participation for such a long time.⁷⁹

Womanism over the years has been the catalyst for many other womanist theories and theologies because of the diversity of Black women’s experiences.⁸⁰

Womanist is a term that emerges from black culture, which is historically communal in nature. When defined autonomously, it lacks the depth and breadth of experiential wisdom that black women bring to womanist identity. Those who attempt to define the term ‘womanist’ individually meet a plethora of voices who caution that the single-lensed perspective must be sharpened into a prism to cast the multicolored light of communal womanist wisdom.⁸¹

Key figures in the first wave of womanism are Katie Geneva Cannon, Delores Williams, Jacqueline Grant, and Renita Weems.⁸² Cannon’s essay, “The Emergence of Black Feminist Consciousness,” changed the world of theology and ethics by

⁷⁷ Paris and Crump, *African American Theological Ethics*, xvii.

⁷⁸ Paris and Crump, *African American Theological Ethics*, xvii.

⁷⁹ Paris and Crump, *African American Theological Ethics*, xvii.

⁸⁰ Floyd-Thomas, *Deeper Shades of Purple*, 165.

⁸¹ Floyd-Thomas, *Deeper Shades of Purple*, 165.

⁸² Harris, *Ecowomanism*, 117-118.

repositioning African American women as the conversation's center.⁸³ No longer was it appropriate to leave women, specifically Black women, out of the conversation, thus beginning the many variations of womanist theology.⁸⁴ Delores S. Williams used the Black feminist methodology as a launching pad after being challenged by her professor to stop reading the Bible from a male and even a Black male perspective and to let her starting point be, "I am a Black Woman."⁸⁵ Williams identified two traditions of biblical appropriation that helped to construct Black liberation.⁸⁶ One tradition was the liberation of the oppressed, and the other was the focus on the male characters in the Bible.⁸⁷ Williams named this "the liberation tradition of African-American biblical appropriation, which would highlight the stories of female characters once left out of most storytelling."⁸⁸ "It lifted female activity and de-emphasized male authority."⁸⁹

Jacqueline Grant challenged the sexism found in Black theology and was acknowledged and addressed by Rev. Dr. James H. Cone.⁹⁰ "Cone and others would begin to use inclusive language and address (at least in rhetoric) sexism as a problem internal to Black theology and as a major source of injustice on the societal level."⁹¹

⁸³ Harris, *Ecowomanism*, 117-118.

⁸⁴ Harris, *Ecowomanism*, 118.

⁸⁵ Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: New York: Orbis Books, 2013), 1.

⁸⁶ Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 1.

⁸⁷ Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 2.

⁸⁸ Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 2.

⁸⁹ Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 2.

⁹⁰ Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas and Anthony B. Pinn, eds., *Liberation Theologies in the United States: An Introduction* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2010), 26.

⁹¹ Floyd-Thomas and Pinn, *Liberation Theologies*, 26.

Grant also challenged feminist theology and its inadequacy for Black women.⁹² “Feminist theology is inadequate for two reasons: it is White and racist. Feminist theologians are White in terms of their race and in terms of the nature of the sources they use for the development of their theological perspectives.”⁹³ The Christology used in feminism is “undebatably male” and used structural oppression of women, which was problematic for Grant.⁹⁴ This Christ, although very male, was not the Jesus Grant experienced as a young girl.⁹⁵

The theology of somebodiness which [her parents] lived out conveyed to their children that in spite of the world’s denial of you, Jesus (God) affirms you. So you must go on. Hence, the personal commitment I made to Jesus as a youngster was not one that restricted me as a Black person or as a female, but affirmed me and projected me into areas where, I later learned, ‘I was not supposed to go’ by virtue of my race and gender.⁹⁶

Weems was the first scholar to include womanist thought in interpreting vital biblical texts,⁹⁷ thus showing her ability to share womanist theology with those with no place in the academy. She reminds womanists of the academy of the possibility of exploiting and excluding poor and less educated women because they are not in dialogue with those voices.⁹⁸

I am the daughter and granddaughter of domestics and the great-granddaughter of a slave. Yet through freak circumstances and the grace of God, I am an educated

⁹² Jacqueline Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response*, American Academy of Religion Academy Series, No. 64 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989), 195.

⁹³ Grant, *White Women's Christ*, 195.

⁹⁴ Grant, *White Women's Christ*, ix.

⁹⁵ Grant, *White Women's Christ*, ix.

⁹⁶ Grant, *White Women's Christ*, ix.

⁹⁷ Harris, *Ecowomanism*, 118.

⁹⁸ Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 165.

and employed black woman upon whom, from time to time, capitalism confers the opportunity to exploit other women – both black and white. My potential victims are those who are neither educated nor employed.⁹⁹

The opening of womanist thought increased during the Second Wave of Womanism with figures like ethicist Emilie M. Townes who included more voices in the discourse.¹⁰⁰ Including the African diaspora and its rich cultural heritage provided hope and justice themes to the burgeoning African-American epistemology.¹⁰¹ She argues that “a specialized approach with attention to the vastness (both geographical and religious plurality alive in the communal religious practices and people of the African diaspora) of the particular be used when studying the interreligious contours of womanist religious and African American religious thought.”¹⁰² Moving from the standard mode of deconstructive criticism, Townes opted to use constructive criticism by using African American women’s literature to advance scholarly womanist thought further.¹⁰³

Some scholars of womanist theology, like Cheryl J. Sanders, challenged womanist thought and concluded that it should include “lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons” to be all-encompassing.¹⁰⁴ On the other hand, Melanie L. Harris asserts that because Walker’s definition of womanist derived from her socio-cultural religious perspectives, Walker’s womanism was more womanist humanism, a

⁹⁹ Renita Weems, *Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women’s Relationships in the Bible* (San Diego, CA: LuraMedia, 1988), 11.

¹⁰⁰ Harris, *Ecowomanism*, 119.

¹⁰¹ Harris, *Ecowomanism*, 119.

¹⁰² Harris, *Ecowomanism*, 119.

¹⁰³ Harris, *Ecowomanism*, 119-120.

¹⁰⁴ Harris, *Ecowomanism*, 118.

combination of womanism and Black humanism.¹⁰⁵ Layli Maparyan further expands womanism by saying that it can show up spiritually anywhere and is not confined to any space.¹⁰⁶ “The womanist idea is nonideological and capable of cropping up nearly anywhere. In this sense, womanism exists as one expression of a particular zeitgeist, one that is arguably expanding at this time.”¹⁰⁷

Conclusion

Ms. Ida B. Wells-Barnett, as a historical figure, was fearless in the face of adversity despite the oppression she faced as a Black woman. She began the anti-lynching campaign and movement that helped her community by overcoming many of the obstacles lodged at her. Wells-Barnett imbibed the womanist spirit well before Alice Walker named that spirit “womanish” and before the academy of womanist theologians re-membered what had been missing in their lives. Wells-Barnett continues to be a role model for Black women’s lives by using all they have suffered to better their communities.

As an oppressed woman of color, the biblical character Rizpah (2 Sm 21:10-14) could have been a womanist as she guarded her dead sons’ bodies that hung before the community as so many Black women have done for their sons. Like Wells-Barnett, Rizpah’s actions changed her community and forced the dominant forces at work to

¹⁰⁵ Harris, *Womanist Humanism*, 211-212.

¹⁰⁶ Layli Maparyan, *The Womanist Idea* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), 90.

¹⁰⁷ Maparyan, *The Womanist Idea*, 90.

change their stance because of her “womanish” behavior and love for her sons and community.

My project intends to develop a program for twelve Black women who live in the Valley Stream area and desire support in their endeavors to speak truth to power to a society that calls them “less than.” Women’s stories, like Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Rizpah, Mamie Till-Mobley, and The Woman with the Issue of Blood, along with the participants’ own stories empower them to continue to fight for their children and communities.

This project is significant because Black women experience racial and gender discrimination. Because of prejudices, Black women are viewed as lacking the wherewithal to succeed and bring value to the table. This racism, patriarchy, and often misogynoir is why Black women need support in their community activism efforts.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

Chapter five examines Feminist Theory (FT) through the lens of Black Feminist Thought (BFT) and Intersectionality. Feminist Theory sits under the umbrella of Critical Social Theory (CST) or Critical Theory and its overarching field of Sociology.¹

“Sociology emerged as a legitimate field of study as intellectuals began to recognize that, through systematic inquiry, one could acquire a clearer understanding of the factors that shape social life.”²

Sociology is about interdependence and how human beings view each other and asks humanity to reflect on the possibility that our thoughts might not be derived from us but ideas we might have acquired from others.³ “The ‘oughts’ and ‘shoulds’ are learned, and we depend on them to serve as a basis for making individual choices and to gauge our behaviors as ‘suitable’ or ‘appropriate.’”⁴ Sociology is “supradisciplinary”⁵ in that it is found in various other disciplines like anthropology, history, psychology, geography,

¹ Patricia Hill Collins, *Intersectionality As Critical Social Theory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 3.

² Nathan Rousseau, *Society Explained: An Introduction to Sociology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2014), 17.

³ Rousseau, *Society Explained*, 13.

⁴ Rousseau, *Society Explained*, 13.

⁵ Raymond A. Morrow and David D. Brown, *Critical Theory and Methodology* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 1994), 6.

political science, economics, and, more recently, the information societies of social media.⁶

Critical Social Theory originated in the 1920s at the Frankfurt School by German scholars who used its model to gently critique other social theories, such as Marx's social theory.⁷ It was a tenuous situation for the school because they conducted this critical work during World War II.⁸ The fascist government was determined to destroy "Jews, Roma people, homosexuals, political dissidents, mixed-raced people, and other ostensibly undesirable people from the German nation-state."⁹ "Consequently, the Frankfurt Institute moved from Germany to Geneva and finally to New York, where it became part of Columbia University."¹⁰ The director and scholar of the Frankfurt School, also called the Institute for Social Research, Max Horkheimer, distinguished Marx's Social Theory from CST.¹¹ It also "no longer exclusively identified with the Marxist tradition nor was it reserved solely for the Frankfurt School."¹²

Horkheimer distinguished CST from Traditional Social Theory in the following way:

- (1) A distinctive theory of how social change has been and be brought about; (2) adherence to an ethical social justice framework that aspires to a better society; (3) engagement in dialectical analysis that conceptualizes critical analysis in the

⁶ Morrow and Brown, *Critical Theory*, 3.

⁷ Collins, *Intersectionality*, 57.

⁸ Collins, *Intersectionality*, 57.

⁹ Collins, *Intersectionality*, 57.

¹⁰ Collins, *Intersectionality*, 58.

¹¹ Morrow and Brown, *Critical Theory*, 3.

¹² Morrow and Brown, *Critical Theory*, 3.

context of socially situated power relations; and (4) reflective accountability concerning critical theory's own practices.¹³

CST can also appear in other fields and the applied and professional fields of education, social work, public administration, and organizational studies.¹⁴

Feminist Theory (FT) arose from work done at many colleges and universities around gender equity and justice.¹⁵ “Women’s studies scholars have developed a rich tradition of feminist criticism within both traditional and other disciplines and interdisciplinary fields of study,” thus bringing visibility to FT.¹⁶ Feminist Theory was born in the academy, yet its genesis has real implications for every woman through social movements that address issues such as “reproductive rights, sexual harassment, wage disparities, family policies, and violence against women.”¹⁷ Feminist philosophers added to FT by exploring “the epistemological foundations of Western knowledge itself, arguing that those foundations constituted an important arena of feminist critical thought.”¹⁸

Under FT, I included BFT and an Intersectionality Framework because one of the criticisms of FT analyzed the lack of the Black female voice within it.¹⁹ “Bringing a racial frame into feminism challenged the false universal of whiteness as a normalizing

¹³ Collins, *Intersectionality*, 6.

¹⁴ Morrow and Brown, *Critical Theory*, 6.

¹⁵ Collins, *Intersectionality*, 98.

¹⁶ Collins, *Intersectionality*, 98-99.

¹⁷ Collins, *Intersectionality*, 99.

¹⁸ Collins, *Intersectionality*, 99.

¹⁹ Collins, *Intersectionality*, 104.

standard that was used to explain the experiences of all women.”²⁰ Intersectionality has sought to remedy these biases found within FT.²¹

Intersectionality acknowledges but does not unsettle the differences that already exist within feminism itself. Within feminist projects that lack historical specificity, intersectionality can serve as a benchmark for all the other ‘others’ who were not acknowledged within a racially segregated feminism before the more enlightened intersectional feminism of today.²²

Intersectionality bundles together ideas from disparate places, times, and perspectives, enabling people to share points of view that formerly were forbidden, outlawed, or simply obscured. Yet because ideas in and of themselves do not foster social change, intersectionality is not just a set of ideas. Instead, because they inform social action, intersectionality’s ideas have consequences in the world.²³

“The European model of “either/or binary thinking is less relevant for intersectionality.”²⁴

“Instead, intersectionality projects look at the relationships among seemingly different phenomena.”²⁵

Studying FT, BFT and Intersectionality will give a deeper understanding of Black women’s oppressions while contributing to my study of whether Black women who attend female gender-specific, faith-based group meetings benefit from such gatherings and encourage community involvement. Feminist Theory discusses many of the themes

²⁰ Collins, *Intersectionality*, 107.

²¹ Collins, *Intersectionality*, 107.

²² Collins, *Intersectionality*, 107.

²³ Collins, *Intersectionality*, 2.

²⁴ Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality Revisited*, in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, Fourth ed., ed. Maurianne Adams (New York, NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), 60.

²⁵ Collins and Bilge, *Intersectionality Revisited*, 60.

of this project, such as Black women in their roles as mothers, women-centered network participants, and prophetic activists.

Interdisciplinary Theory

Project Theme

The theme of my project is to encourage Black women to embrace their legacy of prophetic activism through sharing faith stories of historical and biblical prophetic women. Prophetic is “a religious understanding of politics defined by its inclusiveness, its concern for the other, for those who are marginalized.”²⁶ The project is important because Black women experience racial and gender discrimination, which is unique because of its intersectionality. Within a patriarchal and often misogynistic society, Black women have not been esteemed for their creative ways of activism within their families and communities. Because of these prejudices, my interest is in women-centered groups that remind Black women of their history of Prophetic Activism birthed out of oppressive systems.

Feminist Theory through Black Feminist Thought and Intersectionality offers a theory and framework for Black women’s resistance that manifests into community activism. Given these methods of studying Black women’s history and activism, I assert that if Black women participate in female, gender-specific, faith-based group meetings and share culturally relevant stories of faith overcoming hardships, they will be

²⁶ Helene Slessarev-Jamir, *Prophetic Activism: Progressive Religions Justice Movements in Contemporary America* (New York, NY: and London, UK: University Press, 2011), 4.

encouraged to make a sustainable social impact in their communities. Black women benefit from sharing their stories of struggle and hardships, thus accessing their inner creativity and ability to provide for their families, children, and communities. Support given to Black women from Black women can lead to shared resources, and when resources are shared, it is encouraging to the entire network of Black women. Once marginalized, Black women can begin to walk in the power of Rizpah and Ida. Through support groups like this, children will be protected, and entire communities will benefit from women's intrinsic ability to protect and empower their communities.

The stories of women of color, like those of Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Rizpah, and others in secular and biblical history, and Black women participants' stories will help encourage them to continue confronting the ills of society that have so many communities of color struggling to exist. For example, Rizpah guarding her dead sons' bodies mirrors the many Black mothers who have had to watch over their dead sons' bodies. In her time, Wells-Barnett prophetically called attention to lynchings and could very well be working to resolve the same issues in many Black communities today. These stories of hardship, resilience, and ownership of all community issues will inspire the Black women in my project to exhibit much "womanish" behavior to incur change.

Biblical Foundations

Motherhood takes a principal role in the story of Rizpah and the death of her sons. Rizpah's prophetic actions and relationship with God were catalysts for healing an entire land in 2 Samuel 21:1-14. With her influential acts and activism, she placed herself as a prophetic witness to the story of the unjust deaths of her sons. Her sacrifice of protecting

her sons' bodies for seven months through extreme weather and wild animals motivated David to honor the bones of Saul and his sons with a proper burial, thus helping to heal a community (2 Sm 21:10-14). Another critical aspect of Rizpah's story is that she protected the bodies of her biological sons and that of her sister Merab's five sons.²⁷ The men in their culture defined Rizpah and other women because they had no voice. The hardship of Black women mirrors the story of Rizpah as they have worked diligently to define themselves wholly through race, class, gender, nation, and other intersections.

Until the 1970s and the rise of Black Feminism, Black motherhood was researched primarily by Black and White men, therefore, leaving Black mothers to be defined by systems of patriarchy.²⁸

Simultaneously, feminist [who]work[ed] on motherhood lacked Black women's voices because 'dedicated to demystifying the traditional family ideal, much work from this period confronted prevailing analyses of White middle-class women's experiences as mothers.'²⁹

As a result, Black women have either been misrepresented as bad mothers by the White community or 'superstrong Black mothers' from the Black male community.³⁰

Both of these mischaracterizations place Black women in objectified positions by being defined wrongly by others.³¹

Therefore, African-American women need a revitalized Black feminist analysis of motherhood that debunks the image of 'happy slave,' whether the White-male-created 'matriarch' or the Black-male-perpetuated 'superstrong Black mother.'³²

²⁷ Wil C. Gafney, *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and The Throne* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 198.

²⁸ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, Second ed., Routledge Classics (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015), 187.

²⁹ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 188.

³⁰ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 189.

³¹ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 188-189.

³² Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 190.

Black mothers' use of women-centered networks has allowed Black women to meet the needs of children in their communities.³³ "Organized, resilient, women-centered networks of bloodmothers and othermothers are key in understanding this centrality. Grandmothers, sisters, aunts, or cousins act as othermothers by taking on child-care responsibilities for one another's children."³⁴ In these relationships between Black women, they become family as if blood-related.³⁵ "The resiliency of women-centered family networks and their willingness to take responsibility for Black children illustrates how African-influenced understandings of the family have been continually reworked to help African-Americans as a collectivity cope with and resist oppression."³⁶ The power of othermothers allows Black women to care for others' children as their own thus creating a new and inclusive language of "our" within the community.³⁷ Black women, in this way, own and take responsibility for their sisters' children.³⁸

Out of this other mothering comes activist mothering, where Black women become community advocates by doing the work first for their children.³⁹ "Community othermothers' participation in activist mothering demonstrates a clear rejection of separateness and individual interest as the basis of either community organization or

³³ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 193.

³⁴ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 193.

³⁵ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 194.

³⁶ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 197.

³⁷ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 205-206.

³⁸ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 205-206.

³⁹ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 205-206.

individual self-actualization.”⁴⁰ The desire of some Black women to “uplift the race” is a powerful catalyst for their community work.⁴¹ “Such power is transformative in that Black women’s relationships with children and other vulnerable community members are not intended to dominate or control. Rather, their purpose is to bring people along.”⁴² Motherhood as a representation of power can empower Black women to take up causes for their communities when the needs arise.⁴³ The Rizpahs of the world, seen through the eyes of Black women, continue to grieve over the injustices enacted upon them and their communities; however, through their activism, they continue to count their children and their communities’ children as their own and worth saving.

Historical Foundations

Feminist Theory through Black Feminist Thought and an Intersectionality lens are essential to my historical project with Ida B. Wells because the anti-lynching movement she began intersected race, gender, and class. Had Feminist Theory been created in Wells-Barnett’s time, her work could have been a part of the

[R]esistant knowledge traditions that originate[d] from subordinated peoples who oppose the social inequalities and social concerns of people who are subordinated within domestic and global expressions of racism, sexism, capitalism, colonialism, and similar systems of political domination and economic exploitation.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 207.

⁴¹ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 208.

⁴² Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 208.

⁴³ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 210.

⁴⁴ Collins, *Intersectionality*, 10.

Oppressed people have a deep-rooted interest in abolishing and resisting these *isms*.⁴⁵

With the experiences of the oppressed group as the catalyst for social action, this work grounds itself in power relations theory instead of reacting to power inequality.⁴⁶ Wells-Barnett's experiences of seeing her three friends lynched, as well as her gender and the politics of sexuality, could have positioned her firmly within this tradition of resistance.⁴⁷

In response to the lynching of her neighbors, Wells-Barnett wrote a hard-hitting editorial that criticized the prevailing wisdom about lynching. Wells-Barnett claimed that not only were African American men often falsely accused of rape, but that because some white women were attracted to Black men, some sexual relations that did occur between African American men and white women were consensual.⁴⁸

Wells-Barnett introduced an examination of gendered violence through the lens of interracial sexuality.⁴⁹

Wells-Barnett's ideas generated considerable controversy when she dared to claim that many of the sexual liaisons between white women and Black men were in fact consensual, and most certainly were not rape. Moreover, she indicted white men as the actual perpetrators of crimes of sexual violence against African American men via lynching and African American women via rape.⁵⁰

Wells-Barnett also confronted capitalism and class disparities presented within her anti-lynching efforts seeing a decline in the three-day mob in New Orleans only after financial ramifications appeared.⁵¹ In Wells-Barnett's editorial on "Mob Rule in New Orleans," she offers,

⁴⁵ Collins, *Intersectionality*, 10.

⁴⁶ Collins, *Intersectionality*, 12.

⁴⁷ Collins, *Intersectionality*, 160.

⁴⁸ Collins, *Intersectionality*, 161.

⁴⁹ Collins, *Intersectionality*, 163.

⁵⁰ Collins, *Intersectionality*, 163.

⁵¹ Collins, *Intersectionality*, 163.

It was so with New Orleans on that Thursday. The better element of the white citizens began to realize that New Orleans in the hands of a mob would not prove a promising investment for Eastern capital, so the better element began to stir itself, not for the purpose of punishing the brutality against the Negroes who had been beaten, or bringing to justice the murderers of those who had been killed, but for the purpose of saving the city's credit.⁵²

Having been born to emancipated slaves and working her way into the middle class through education, Wells-Barnett understood the workings of capitalism and class and worked in the intersectionality of race, gender, and sexuality to address disparities within her world.⁵³

Wells-Barnett's work in the anti-lynching arena is an excellent example of "women's intellectual activism that reflected social action as a way of knowing and lays the foundation for an intersectional analysis of state-sanctioned violence."⁵⁴ She intimated that the horror of lynching had more to do with the biases embedded into the structure of a racist society than with individual motivations.⁵⁵ Her experiences as a Black woman, her actions, and her analysis of lynching "lays a foundation for intersectionality's guiding premises of using race, sexuality, class, and gender as intersecting systems of power to solve social problems and advances our understanding of Black sexual politics that is controlled through racism, heteropatriarchy, and class."⁵⁶

⁵² Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Mob Rule in New Orleans: Robert Charles and His Fight to the Death, The Story of His Life, Burning Human Beings Alive, Other Lynchings Statistics*, (Kindle Location 280 and 287), Ebook, 2005, www.gutenberg.org.

⁵³ Collins, *Intersectionality*, 160.

⁵⁴ Collins, *Intersectionality*, 160.

⁵⁵ Collins, *Intersectionality*, 162.

⁵⁶ Collins, *Intersectionality*, 160-163.

Intersectionality is positioned within these various domains of power and analyzed across disciplines.⁵⁷

Theological Foundations

Black women's exclusion from Feminist Theory (FT) made it apparent to include the Black women's voice which included conversations on race, gender, and class. In Black Feminist Thought, like womanist theology, Black women's activism finds "group survival" crucial to community survival.⁵⁸ The second tenet of womanist theology is Traditional Communalism, which honors Black women's one-on-one and group relationships.⁵⁹ "Black feminists work portrays African-American women as individuals and as a group struggling toward empowerment within an overarching matrix of domination."⁶⁰ "Domination encompasses structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power, and these domains constitute specific sites where oppressions of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation mutually construct one another."⁶¹ "Historically, African-Americans' resistance to racial and class oppression could not have occurred without an accompanying struggle for group survival."⁶²

⁵⁷ Collins and Bilge, *Intersectionality Revisited*, 62.

⁵⁸ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 219.

⁵⁹ Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism In Religion and Society* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006), 78.

⁶⁰ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 218.

⁶¹ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 218.

⁶² Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 217.

The need for group survival was evident because of the exclusion of Black women from public domains where society could hear their concerns.⁶³ Therefore, much of Black women's resistance efforts were accomplished through the family and the local community.⁶⁴

A black mother who may be unable to articulate her political ideology but who on a daily basis contests school policies harmful to her children may be more an 'activist' than the most highly educated Black feminist who, while she can manipulate feminist, nationalist, postmodern, and other ideologies, produces no tangible political changes in anyone's life but her own. Rather than reducing Black women's activism to some 'essentialist' core of 'authentic' Black women's activism origination in Black feminist imaginations, this approach creates space for diverse African-American women to see how their current or potential everyday activities participate in Black women's activism.⁶⁵

The need for group survival led to Black women creating "spheres of influence that resist oppressive structures by undermining them."⁶⁶ Again, this did not occur in public, nor would it have been tolerated in most instances, but it was accomplished subversively, finding other ways to resist.⁶⁷

The Black female sphere of influence created in this case was Black women's refusal to relinquish control over their self-definitions. While they pretend to be mules and mammies and thus appear to conform to institutional rules, they resist by creating their own self-definitions and self-valuations in the safe spaces they create among one another.⁶⁸

The tenet of redemptive self-love in womanist theology allows Black women to express themselves lovingly while standing up for themselves despite others' and society's

⁶³ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 219.

⁶⁴ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 219.

⁶⁵ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 218-219.

⁶⁶ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 219.

⁶⁷ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 219-220.

⁶⁸ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 219 -220.

thinking about them.⁶⁹ “That space while it lasts should be nurturing space where you sift out what people are saying about you and decide who you really are.”⁷⁰

Conclusion

Researching Feminist Thought, Black Feminist Thought and Intersectionality has been a gift to this project. Sociology should be studied for any project that uses human subjects because it is the study of human beings within their social contexts. It was essential to examine feminist theory since Womanist Theology was borne out of the feminist movement. However, Feminist Thought alone is insufficient when discussing Black women and their needs, so the inclusion of Black Feminist Thought and Intersectionality was pertinent to my project. Black women have unique oppressions and do not fit into the female or Black category alone. Black women being both Black and female, in and of itself, is another category to be considered when discussing Black women’s lives and experiences. These intersections can also include sexuality, nation, and the complexities of culture.

Many Black women first become community activists through their mothering efforts; motherhood and women-centered networks are crucial to their development as prophetic activists. Black women bear witness to prophetic “acts” as they unfold and may not even know the positive ramifications that come from them in their “natural” roles of being mothers through their lived oppressions. Women-centered groups have been significant to Black women and their children’s and communities’ futures. Even non-

⁶⁹ Kymberly P. Johnson, *The Womanist Preacher: Proclaiming Womanist Rhetoric from the Pulpit* (Minneapolis, MN: Lexington Books, 2017), 59.

⁷⁰ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 223.

biological mothers have become othermothers and mother activists for the betterment on behalf of their communities. Kinships are significant within the African-American culture because Black women often take others' children as their own. These women-centered networks remain essential to the thriving of Black women and their communities.

These networks offered support that Black women could not get elsewhere. The stories Black women told each other in these groupings allowed Black women to advocate for themselves and their children. These groups were where Black women could affirm, name, and self-value themselves when the world was telling them differently. Expressions of radical subjectivity, traditional communalism, and redemptive self-love could happen within these groups and lead to high esteem and perseverance to advocate for their needs and the needs of the whole.

Though the biblical character Rizpah looked alone as she stood on the mountain defending the bodies of her sons, I am sure that she had those opportunities, as women historically do, to discuss the tragedy of what was happening with her sisters. Rizpah protecting her and her sister's sons shows that she had become a prophetic activist, caring for her entire community. Rizpah's actions sent ripples around her land, even being the catalyst to David honoring his predecessor Saul's reign and family lineage. I am confident that her sisters stood in awe at her actions discussed in the seclusion of their women-only gatherings.

Ida B. Wells-Barnett also grew up when the Black community, under their circumstances, had to gather alone, sometimes just within their own families, to learn "womanish" behavior that would sustain them through Emancipation. Drawing strength from her community, she started a revolution against lynching in America. Wells-

Barnett's activism could have been a part of the "resistant knowledge traditions" within Black Feminist Thought because her movement also began from the need for subordinated people to be free from racial, gender, and capitalistic oppression. Like most other Black women who fought for a cause, she had a deep-seated need to resist the horrific acts of lynching.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

The role of Prophetic Activism in Black women's lives is critical because, as Howard Thurman states, "It is religion that speaks to those who live with their backs against the wall."¹ Black women use their faith, women-centered networks, and stories of struggle as empowerment to do the miraculous when the world says they cannot because of their circumstances. This doctoral thesis and project studied the Black women's innovative spirit through a lens of prophetic activism, womanist theology, and the faith stories that undergird the creation of programs that benefit their children and communities. Through my research, I found that Black women benefited from sharing stories of struggle and hardships, thus accessing their ability to make a change in their communities.

Prophetic activism refers to churches extending their reach beyond the four walls of the church community to facilitate economic and political empowerment to benefit African American communities as a whole.² This project partnered with a church

¹ Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996), 7, <https://search-ebscohostcom.dtl.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=715753&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

² Diedria H. Jordan and Camille M. Wilson, "Supporting African American Student Success Through Prophetic Activism: New Possibilities for Public School-Church Partnerships," *Urban Education* 52, no. 1 (2017): 92.

community with two other community-based organizations to prove its hypothesis. After six weeks of classes, the expectation was that participants would feel a deep connection to their faith, ancestors, and activism legacies, which allowed them to feel motivated to facilitate work in their communities for the greater good.

Methodology

As the project manager, I worked with the context associates to gather observational data as participants shared in the stories of resilient Biblical and Black women historical figures such as Rizpah and Ida B. Wells-Barnett. In addition, the group shared their stories of overcoming obstacles in their lives. By sharing stories, I hypothesized that participants would better understand Prophetic Activism and even be able to view themselves as Prophetic Activists, thus being motivated to change their communities. Using the pro-active qualitative research method, the data collection methods used were as follows: 1) pre-and-post surveys, 2) observations of a six-week class of group discussions based on five self-designed curricula given by PowerPoint presentations called “Rizpah’s Daughters,” which had lessons on Rizpah, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Mamie Till-Mobley, and the Woman with the Issue of Blood, and 3) weekly journaling prompts to further enhance the narrative experiences for participants.

My research methodology was the proactive action research method. I gathered observational material during the six discussion periods held during the six-week classes. I used journaling to collect more data on whether participants learned of the resilience and prophetic activism of biblical and Black women historical figures such as Rizpah and Ida B. Wells-Barnett.

The following verbatim transcripts were recorded and transcribed by rev.com transcription services. The recordings will remain on the researcher's server for one year until June 13, 2023, in agreement with the signed participant consent letter. The researcher used an edited/partial/semi-verbatim approach which only excluded "ums," "ahs," and repeated words with no significance to the meaning. The utterance "um" was used approximately 381 times, "uh" was used 101 times, and "you know" was used 436 times and took away from the flow of the verbatim; therefore, they were replaced with an "em dash" for more clarity. Only a portion of all replies is below. All responses come from the participants within the six-class period.

During the weekly group discussions, participants were asked the same five questions at the end of the presentation. The questions were: 1) How can you utilize what you've learned today in your own lives? 2) Can any of you relate personally to these types of struggles? 3) What stood out for you after this lesson? 4) Can you share a story of struggle that came up for you during the presentation? 5) In your opinion, what made the character a prophetic activist?

Abbreviations are used to identify the roles of the participants and the Context Associates asking the questions. The abbreviations are P1-P20 (participant and the number given to participant for identifying purposes), CA1 (context associate 1), and CA2 (context associate 2).

Class Sessions

Class One

In the first class on June 13, 2022, I taught about Rizpah in 2 Samuel 21:1-14. Most participants were unfamiliar with the story of Rizpah, and some had never heard of her. A few participants had their cameras off as I began, and I could tell that some were multitasking. For example, P7 was watching her grandchildren; P10 had her one-year-old on her lap; and others appeared preoccupied with other things. I expected this would happen as Black women have busy lives and still need to take care of responsibilities. However, I was pleasantly surprised when the discussion began and all cameras were turned on. I told everyone at the beginning of the class that it would be better to have the cameras on during the discussion part. Participants appeared attentive during the discussion period.

The context associate asked the same five questions in each class to generate conversation and to determine whether the teaching was effective. The first question was: “How can you utilize what you’ve learned today in your own lives?” After the presentation and discussion, participants appeared to have understood the invitation to see themselves as prophetic activists. Here are some of the responses from the first class. P6 stated,

We can relate to different, —, social issues when, —, one person decides to stand against injustice, how that can then implement a new law, which will then not only impact those in that era but for generations. So, I just thought that that was, —, interesting. And so that, —, could impact us to think about stepping out a little

more on things, as opposed to holding back and realize that our one action can impact more than just our current, — circumstance.

P17 concurred,

Amen. Going above and beyond is the first thing that came to me. Going above and beyond the call in regards to how we treat people. And because we don't know the backstory of every single person, there's always a backstory. And just having more compassion like P4 mentioned and being more compassionate. That's the first two words that came to me, going above and beyond the call when we're dealing with people, situations, and circumstances.

Participants understood the content of the teachings, as evidenced by the discussion surrounding the presentations and critical thinking during the discussion. P18 stated,

Yeah. I was listening to all of the comments and heard of this second wife, et cetera. And what I'm hearing is truly not just second wife, I'm hearing a more global issue, —, and as second-class citizens, cause if you're in, a, —, society, that's ruled by men, —, they kind of manage and message the information that's going to come out. And so, when we talk about activism in your community, that's the immediate, but it has to be a thought that's much wider because with the misogynist, —, a society where men are representing what should happen to women, I mean, you look at it all over the world. Women have been placed as second-class citizens.

It's definitely beyond our community because whatever happens there is going to happen wherever it's happening in the world; —. If you have a community where they disregard women or consider them second-class citizens, almost like our constitution represented us initially as two-thirds, <laugh> we, that could just come across oceans and oceans, and we can be impacted.'

P13 adds,

'I just wanted to say something. It's amazing to me how women can be regarded as second-class citizens. When we pretty much create, make the world go on <laugh> and on and on, we, —, we create the bodies and men, —, put us under, give us these titles.'

The next question was, "What made the character a prophetic activist?" The participants wanted to hear the definition of prophetic activism, which I did not give

them. I purposefully did not define it because I wanted to gauge if the participants could come up with their own definitions, which they did throughout the discussion. P6 stated,

I thought it was interesting that her act, —, of being there for her children and those children —impacted the whole land. Right. So, it can take us doing one thing for where we see that we are being led to do and don't realize the impact it has, —, on a whole, —, or down the line, or even the ripple effect. So, all it takes is that one act. And if we're focused on doing that one thing that we see, —, or that we have that urging to do, or maybe that calling from God to do, —, just that one thing can be a big, powerful thing —to impact something bigger than we can actually see in our immediate, —, situation and circumstance, which also like a lot of people raised tonight.

Participants still defined the term without being given a formal definition of prophetic activism through their discussions on the main characters' actions. I did, however, define prophetic activism as,

Church activities that extend beyond the walls of a church to benefit members of African American communities to facilitate the economic and political empowerment of African Americans. Many scholars use the term prophetic to describe Black churches that focus on the spiritual development of Black churchgoers and their efforts to provide African American communities some of the resources needed to pursue liberty and justice.³

I added the definition of Dr. William J. Barber, II, of the prophetic voice: “The prophetic voice rises when government systems and sometimes even religious systems abdicate their responsibility to those whom scripture calls the least of these.”⁴ After I gave the definition, P8 responded,

Yes, she spoke truth to power. So, we could define her as prophetic through her actions. P9 said, ‘I believe somebody said she moved with a purpose. She did it, and she pushed it, and she kept doing it every day, every day, rain and shine didn't matter. I'm gonna get him buried. My action now is gonna get me the

³ Deidra H. Jordan and Camille M. Wilson, “Supporting African American Student Success Through Prophetic Activism: New Possibilities for Public School-Church,” *Urban Education* 52, no. 1 (August 3, 2016): 92, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00420859145566098>.

⁴ William J. Barber and Barbara Zelzer, *Forward Together: A Moral Message for the Nation* (Nashville, TN: Chalice Press, 2014), vii.

outcome that I need to see later. So that's prophetic activism. She moved now to get a result, to get the outcome she wanted later, knowing that it would come if she kept on being determined to do what she had to do.'

P19 said,

Also, when we were listening to the definition of being prophetic, —, you always think about an utterance that what the person's speaking for the words of God, or —, you don't hear her talking in the text, you do see what she's doing. —, sometimes we talk about it, but we are not about it. —you go to the pulpit, you preach, and you, you say a whole lot of great stuff, but when it's time to go and do something, they can't find you. Right. So, she did not talk about it. She, she was about it. —talk about it. [Her] actions spoke her truth.

P9 agrees,

P19 just said she spoke truth to power, but it didn't require words. It was movement in her actions. Don't speak about it. Be about it. She was about it. You're right. That's perfect. You can communicate verbally, and you can communicate nonverbally. — how, when we give the look mm-hmm <affirmative>. P3 said, 'Also, her action led to the healing of the land. So basically, because of her, it's like she brought the community together.'

Participants understood the power dynamics, the patriarchy, and possible misogyny baked into this text. P17 discussed the rape of Rizpah and how it seemed to be an afterthought.

I noticed in the presentation, when it talked about her being raped by the cousin, it wasn't a lot of, —, talk about what happened to her. Like, —, she was raped. That was like the only thing that was said. And I think about, —, the 'me too' movement today and how so many women —, have not spoken up or now are speaking up.

The rape of Rizpah found in 2 Samuel 3:6-8 was not the focal point for this study; however, the rape did add to the importance of the patriarchal structures within Rizpah's life. However, in answering the participants' questions, I explained the story of Rizpah's rape. P7 responded, "And look at today, politicizing, —, abortion and all of these other things, right? Women's bodies." "He (David) may have been after God's own heart. And that's what, —, the Bible tells us and teaches us that David was, David was a man after

God's own heart, but David was a piece of work,” says P14. Discussion on King David continued with P18 defending King David said, “David was a piece of work, but we have to look at those works that he did that were favorable to God.” P14 countered,

I appreciate what you said, but if we're gonna look at this thing and, and really be transparent and honest, especially when you talk about women in ministry, you talk about women in leadership, you talk about the prophetic voice. There has been a suppression of it, even in the church. And so, what happens, —, many times you could hear when sermons are being delivered and you hear the idolization of David. Now I am not saying that David wasn't after God. I am not saying that God did not use David as a change agent. What I am saying is that he was flawed. He was, and it is, the idolization because I have found over the years that sometimes when my brothers and, in some rare instances, a sister will talk or preach about David and David being after God's own heart. Well, yeah, let's tell the whole story. Right? Husband. He was a murderer. He was, and that is not to take away from him being a man after God's own heart.”

The next question was, “Can any of you relate personally to these struggles?”

Unfortunately, many participants could relate to Rizpah's plight. P7 said,

I would say that my personal struggle is right at this particular moment and listening to this last conversation as being a person who was —, in the carnage of a David and —, as a black woman, as a sister in the church, as a first lady in the church, —, who was in the carnage of a David then I, and I mean in almost every single way. But, —, in conversation with my father to hear him say to me that my David, —that what he did to me and our children was okay, as long as he's saving souls.

And so, I was struggling. I have to say, honestly, right now, as a person who — and a, and a daughter on this line right now who were part of the aftermath and, —, the carnage of it, but to hear even this kind of conversation, and while it may be the truth, it's still hurtful, —, to have somebody say, well, —, he repented, so it's okay. —and that may be true. And I'm not saying that it's not, but I have to say if I'm struggling right now. I'm struggling with —, the personal experience of the carnage of being —, with a David and not being a second wife, <laugh> being a first wife. And truthfully, some of the women actually support the behavior of the David in the church and even help cover it up. So where does that leave those who are victimized by the David?

P14 then responded to P7 using her faith to encourage P7,

The one thing that God never comes short of is the ability to take our pain, turn it into purpose. The ability to have us heal from the inside out, just by, like you're

saying, you still struggling. We don't have the background. We don't need the background. How long, what we can say that clearly, God is advancing you to a point and a place and a position where it's going to be purpose. Even with repentance does not excuse the line being drawn is when that isn't in the equation at all. Right? And, and so that was the framework. And certainly, that is not applicable to you and your circumstance, but I believe that your testimony and witness are gonna help somebody else. And that's why you're still working and God is still working it out in you from the inside out. When you get tired and have had enough of enough, there's so many churches out here. Lord have mercy. And then nowadays, cause of the pandemic and the buildings being shut down, we, the church. So be encouraged.

P9's story of faith overcoming hardships was also compelling and generated conversation within the group.

I just wanna say (about Rizpah) that — having lost two babies and then the Lord allowing me having four, three miscarriages, and then the Lord allowing me to adopt two beautiful children and expanding my family. I get it. I get the mother, I get the, by any means necessary that someone said, I get the I'm gonna be out here until I get it right. I get it. I get the pain that, —, —, we suffer from children. I get the pain that we suffer from our children making bad choices. I, I get that. Rizpah was like, — what? I couldn't save their life, but I know I'm not gonna let this happen. And I get that from that perspective. And that's what it made me think about when I think about all that I do, and I have done and sacrificed for my children, even at the expense of my own, sometimes mental health or happiness.

When I think about that, I take nothing for my journey for my kids. But, —, and now I'm there for my grandchildren. I got a whole other level for them, —? And when I see what's going on, when I see Rizpah standing there for those kids in Uvalde? I see that's what Rizpah did. She stood there until all of them got buried. But — she was not leaving it, and I get it. My heart wept for those children, and Rizpah reminded me of that and reminded me of that heart that a mother has. And the love that a mother has to a fault sometimes where we can't even sometimes see our kids the way we should, but that love where we'll push and push and push until we can at least get them where they're supposed to be and trusting in God for everything else.

—, I've been there where I've had to just turn him over to God cause they ain't doing nothing I'm telling him to do. So —, but in what I'm going through right now, I watch God turn that situation around. And the word says, train for child in a way that he should go. When he is old, he will not depart. And old is not age-old is a place of maturity, and I'm watching my prayers, and I'm watching my labor, and I'm watching the prayers. And some of my sisters who are here who have prayed with me, I'm watching them manifest themselves right now. And my son, who is taking over a family situation right now. So — she did it, she prayed back

then, I prayed back then, and now he's moving forward. So, I thank God. And that's what all the tragedy and all the pain and all the hurt I went through. It was worth it. But that's what it reminded me of.

Class Two

In class two on June 20, 2022, I taught about the prophetic activism of Ida B.

Wells-Barnett. When asked the question, "What stood out for you after this lesson?" the answers were insightful. P3 answered,

I would; —. What stood out to me was her (Wells-Barnett's) determination to help her people become aware of what's going on to help, advocate for them, and make sure that she does as much with her resources to help the blacks. So, she was dedicated to help. She was dedicated to activate for us to do what she could to help us to preserve our lives. That's what stood out for me.

Some participants were incensed at the treatment of Black people at that time. P14 said,

It just makes you wonder what goes through the minds of humans [could] engage in, in the behaviors from that era. I mean, what the ancestors had to go through, and even this is just one sister, Ida B. Wells Barnett, and then even our own silliness of not including her because she didn't, what? Do like you and go to the white man and get a degree to get some validation. I mean, it's just ridiculous. And people wanna know why there is a rift between black women and white women as if it was some foreign concept when they raised the slave masters. The same way that Ida B. Wells talks about motherhood and her children and how being as important as teaching and education. So, I don't, I don't get that kind of mentality, which still exists today. And forgive me for being a little sharp. I refuse to come on camera cause it's too much. It's too much. We always have to give. We always have to set the example. We have to be resilient. Come on. What kinda people are these? Okay, I'm done.

CA1 supported P14 saying, "You're voicing how most of us are feeling right now. You're just verbalizing it for all of us because of the frustration and just seeing that they came out, like it was, —, some kind of event coming from miles away to watch people die. The audacity of sending it in a postcard. I mean, a postcard."

P6 talked about Wells-Barnett's lack of formal education,

Just to piggyback on that. I'm glad, —, P14 mentioned about her —, lack of traditional, —, education. —but it was amazing to me how she still persevered and became an educator despite that based on her experience and her own learning and how she was a profound or renowned writer and journalist and used her gift to bring forth change. —, I thought that was amazing, and that's what we, our people, have dealt with for years, not having limited, —, education through the institution of education but, —, live, —, impactful lives in spite. That's not even including what they have to endure —watching a daily basis, being born into such an environment, and having to endure that and endure attacks. The fact that she was ripped from her seat, —, —, just trying to deal with everyday life of travel, like anybody else, and then like the inequality between her and the white women. —, amazing, —, amazing woman.

Participants then began to discuss the similarities between 1862 and our current racial climate. P5 said,

I think in some ways, — it's still going on today. —, for instance, I guess they went from the lynching into the shooting, —, with so many black people, —, that's getting shot, not just our black males, but our black females too are being shot now. So, I think this is still going on. That's how I feel. —we still fighting for equal rights. We still don't have it.

P7 offered,

—, yeah. I work for the UM church. And —oftentimes, we have to have racial justice seminars for the staff, and she (IBWB) is written about in our history book for United Methodist Women. And many of these women who were against her were so-called Christian women, and they were Methodists. —women who should have known better should have felt better and thought better. —and it's very hard when people of color, particularly black people. When we sit through the seminars, and we have to see all of this in writing that there were many women in the church that believed that to stop black men from raping, lynching was the answer. And it's hard to sit there at work and see that in writing. And to know that supposedly these were church women doing this, not just regular run of the mill, ignorant women, these were supposed to be woke women.”

P19 adds,

I guess, the most shocking, well, there were a lot of shocking things, but to actually know that people had their children out there watching that (lynching) like it was some kind of sport, and the kids, —I've seen pictures where the little

girls are smirking, —, because they don't even realize that what they're looking at is inhumane. We look at it like it was how many years ago, but it's still going on today. This superior attitude and this looking at us, our little girls, are not even seen as innocent, even in preschool. —, they're, they're seen as like little women, —, they, they get suspended, and I'm not even talking about the boys. I'm just thinking about little girls. —, we know what they think about our boys, and it's still going on today. Our children and our grandchildren are still facing that today.

The third question was, "Can you share a story of struggle that came up for you during the presentation?" This question had been answered during the previous discussion, and it was clear that the women needed to vent their frustrations about racism and microaggressions. For example, P8 shared, "I remember being an educator, sitting in a room with a bunch of white folks, and the principal said, will all the paraprofessionals go to your assigned room, and this white woman tapped me and said, oh, did you hear? Because she assumed that I was a paraprofessional." P11 adds, "It's mind-boggling, —, cuz I work for the city of New York and our higher up levels are full of color. And my struggle right now is that, and I know we're a threat <laugh> to the white people, but they're having such a hard time seeing, —, my executive nursing director is black."

My assistant nursing director is black. I'm a director of nursing staff, development of color, and everything we do. They seem to knock it down and complain about it. And they've even said it's too much of us. It's too much of y'all up there. —? And it's just, it's mind-boggling, —, but a part of me looks at it as —I am really, I'm a big dog and, and they're really threatened by me. You can't do what I do, or else you would've been here. Why complain? We all had an opportunity to apply for the same positions, —? We're such a threat, and we need to just make sure that we empower and teach our children, that you are a threat to them from young so that they understand it better as they move up through their education, through their careers, et cetera.

Lastly, the context associate asked, "How can you utilize what you learned today in your own life?" P13 shared,

Ida B. Wells being such an advocate for black people. Just for me being more vocal when I feel like, —, people are, —, being negative towards me in the workplace or anywhere in, —, specifically white people. So, being more vocal

about it cuz I let that go on for too long. —, what happened in my situation? I shouldn't have allowed it to, but I just kind of, —, I don't know what I was thinking, allowing that to go on for as long as it did, but just being more vocal, —, being more confident that no, this is wrong. Yeah.

P7 said, “It just reminded me that being brave is okay. And sometimes you have to be willing to risk, —your comfortability, — in order to make a change.”

Class Three

The third class was on June 27, 2022, and I taught about Mamie Till-Mobley. By this point, participants were ready to discuss and did not wait for a question. P17 stated,

I would like to make, —, a statement. —, I'm an educator, and one of the things that I teach during black history month to my students, I teach high school students is this story about Emmett Till and about his mother and because a lot of the kids have never heard of it. So —, when I asked, does anybody know who Emmet Till is? They said, is he a basketball player? So, I'm like, no, I can't tell you how many kids don't know. And so that's one of the things I make sure we do every year with every group of students that come my way. So, thank you for sharing this story, Ms. Kym. —, yeah, really bless my soul as a detriment, and as tragic as it is, —, this is still going on in our country today.

P11 said,

I just wanted to say I think it's very impactful. But, also, for me, it was for my children when we took them to the African American history museum — and seeing the real picture versus just hearing the story. So —, I think it was very impactful and real and struck a chord. So, I can't even imagine, —, what it did to, —, his mother, his family, but yeah, I think it has to be taught, has to be taught from young about Emmett Till and what happened to him.

P9 remembered learning about Emmett Till,

I remember —when *Ebony* and *Jet* —when she gave them permission to revisit the story, and it was on the covers of those magazines and my parents making sure that those magazines were on the coffee table and making sure that we saw them and telling us the story, —, and how impactful it was. And I remember being horrified at what was done to such a young boy. And I was like, well, how can a grown man do this to a child? I remember asking that question over and over again. And my father got me down and told me some of his stories and told me about the things he endured growing up in Savannah, Georgia, and having to go to Florida and pick oranges and things of that nature. And I remember crying,

and I remember not being able to sleep thinking about this 14-year-old boy that didn't get a chance to be a child.

I remember, —, having back then, I was very much everything I saw and absorbed. I relived in my dreams, —, how, when, —, with kids, that's how it works. And so, I would have nightmares seeing that boy's face, —, and I know they didn't show it to me to give me nightmares. They showed it to me to show me what the country was about and what it really was about. And I remember that there were interviews —with the uncles and how, when he got down there, how they gave him the rules of the segregated south and what he was supposed to do and how he's supposed to cross streets and do different things. And I remember reading that, but in my mind, I'm like, but you still left him by, you still did not cover that child.

It's horrible that this happened to him and it, and it's horrible that it's still happening. But I remember that changing my outlook on the world. It was rosy until I saw this 14-year-old child mutilated, and they weighted his body down and all types of mess in the water and stuff. And I appreciate you not necessarily going into the graphics of it all because they can be triggers. But I remember reading the details at the length they went to, —, cuz they didn't just hang him. They tortured him. They did all types of things to him, which was absolutely disgusting. And then on the woman's deathbed, the one that accused him, to begin with, or that was part of the, they said that she said he never did it. So —they pressured her into saying he did X, Y, Z. I remember it changing me forever and embracing and sinking myself into my culture and my people. And I thank God I had parents that made sure I knew and still know. And I took mine to the African museum — and they saw, sat there —, and saw the pictures. I believe the casket is there and all types of things there that we need to see, cuz it's very important that we know, —, the truth as opposed to what we're being told."

Participants readily spoke when asked what stood out to participants about Mamie

Till-Mobley. P6 said,

Like, —, Reverend KC compared her to the other subjects, —, Rizpah and Ida, her boldness, —, to go against the grain, —, using tragedy, turning it into triumph. She used her gifts like —, the other two ladies to impact change for generations. She used her tragedy, which propelled her into excelling in education, which turned her into a great teacher, which allowed her to impact children for generations.

P5 said, "They will never feel our pain, never. And I remember my brother used to listen to minister Louis Farrakhan and he used to say: "a white man's heaven is a black man's hell."

Just to see the pain she went through as a mother... I'm sure it was unbearable. Until you lose a child at the hand of someone else's. It's a very painful and tragic thing to go through, but she was also strong, bold, and brave. She made a positive impact —, by educating and being an advocate, —, for children. And —we got to learn about it through her, reaching out to us, —, through her activism, —, by writing the stories, letting us know touring, —, touring the country and letting us know. And by having his casket on display at the muse—.

When asked if anyone had been personally affected by the same issues, many comments centered on raising Black boys and the distrust of interracial relationships. P8 said,

I told my sons because my son, my oldest son, is an athlete. I told him, do not date the white girl, cuz this is the reality of it. I said, don't you bring one home, cuz they'll love you for the moment. And next thing — all they have to do is say one thing and life changes, and I know it's wrong, but I had to protect my child. So, when I think of Emmett Till, I think of white women and how treacherous they are and how they'll set you up because we forget this woman knew the truth and she did not tell it. And that's, —, just shows you how people or white women can't be trusted.

P7 concurred with P8,

Well — P8, I'm kind of with you on that. When my nephews were coming up, I would say, don't [go home with a girl] after school by yourself? —? —, and it was only just a few years ago, there was a story of a boy and a girl who had been dating. But the little girl never told daddy that you're dating the black boy. They're in her room — getting busy. Dad walks in, and the little girl said he's raping me, and dad shot him and killed him right there on the spot. And then they go do the investigation. Everybody at school's like, no, they've been dating, and they've been getting busy. He finally got convicted, I think, last year or the year before he finally was convicted for it and went to jail. But I lectured my nephews on the same thing. And I wouldn't say necessarily my feeling is as strong about white women as yours. But I know well enough that I don't want any of my nephews caught in a house alone with a white girl after school. So, I hear you. I hear you.

P1 agreed,

I agree. I admit, —, to doing the same thing. I'm a mother of sons, I'm a sister of brothers — I have a man, I have a father, I'm just surrounded by black, strong men. And — although I don't have a personal story to share, I use these stories of Emmet Till and —, —, Trayvon Martin. And I tell my son every day as he walks

out, and I'm at the beginning stages of letting him go, has he just graduated high school and is on his way to college. And the funny thing is, I'm not scared of him going into a gang, walking through projects, or going into the wrong side of town. I'm scared of the police officers, and I'm scared of white men, and I'm scared of white women.

And just like my aunt said, I honestly told my oldest brother, don't bring home a white woman to me. Don't do it. Cause I'm scared. I'm scared for my kids. I'm scared for my brothers, and I don't know how to get over the emotions. And I've been trying to share this all night, but every time I get ready to talk, I get choked up because I am, but then I deal with my son. So —, mom, I'm safe, I'm safe. No, it's not about being safe. You can be the safest one out there. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter what you are or how you're doing. Like P19 said, they don't know you're a Christian. They don't know you're a good person. They don't know that you are a top honor student in high school, —, and just, —, receive all these awards and achievements. They don't know any of that. All they see is the color of your skin. So how do I, as a young mother — bringing up two black boys and, —, being there for my black brothers and protecting them, and I can't protect them from this, I can't shelter them. So —, I can't, and it scares the crap out of me every day. So, I just wanted to share that it was touching me."

CA1 asked how participants could utilize what they had learned in their lives, and

P14 responded, "Well, tomorrow we <laugh>, we need to put, push to the pavement, right [local elections being held]? <affirmative> pray and put our feet to the pavement.

P9 agreed, "We need to be about what we talk about [it]. Mm-hmm <affirmative> based.

Faith without works is dead." "We need to exercise our power," P14 said. P17 responded with her faith and support for the other women,

Amen and do not have fear; do not allow fear; hallelujah, [to] have control. We believe in our hearts what the word of God says. I believe God. I believe that word. Okay. I believe everything in that word. Mm-hmm <affirmative>. And so, therefore, when my mind begins to question, —, there's scripture in the New Testament that says, 'Lord, I believe, but help my unbelief.' That unbelief is the mind. And that's the only access that the enemy has, is to get in our thought process. That's it. And if we give it place, then he has authority. But if we keep what we know in our heart and our spirit of what the word of God says, oh, he has no place. And the minute those thoughts come into my mind, 2 Corinthians 10:5. I say, I cast down every thought, every imagination and everything that would exalt itself above God. My mind is always racing has always been. I'm an artist, and it's always all over the place, but I must constantly keep it in submission and subjection to the word of God. And every day, I have to confess, 'Lord Jesus, renew my mind because my mind can go someplace.' And so, it's really about the

mind. The mind is the battlefield, people. The mind is the battlefield. So, I'd say that we would need to continue with what we've heard today. Amen.

P9 said that Mamie Till-Mobley was a prophetic activist (PA) because she displayed her son's broken body for all to see.

I want that casket open cuz I want everybody to see what was done to my child. She didn't just mean that day, she did. It changed history that day. She did it and changed lives. It continues to change lives. Think about it. 1956 is when she made sure that the casket was open. And in 2022, we are seeing it, and we are discussing it. She knew that it needed to be told. She knew that it was going to change things. It was greater than her. And even greater than her pain. She knew that she had to share this story. And in sharing that story, here we are today — here we are today, inspired. We may be angry, but we're still inspired. So —, we're grateful. For those of us who haven't had to go through that tragedy — I would say sympathetic and empathetic, and we're angry from a place where it may, it, it hopefully moves us to some more action, but the day she said open that casket and let everybody come here to see it. That was it. That was her being prophetic, knowing it was going to continue well past, even her death. She's been gone for a long time now, and we are still talking, and we are still looking, and we still see it. So, when she started it, that was the prophecy just moving forward. She did that for me, I wasn't born yet, but she opened that casket. She opened it for my son. She opened it for my daughter. She opened it for my grandson. She opened it for all of us.

Fourth Class

July 5, 2022, was our fourth class. I taught about the “Woman with the Issue of Blood,” and CA1 asked what stood out about her. P17 stated,

I feel like, —, the treatment of her back then and still to this day, the treatment of women to this day, —, has evolved, but is still, —, a stigma as it pertains to us as females. And that just the lesser, —, acknowledgment that we always have to fight more. —, and so that's what stands out for me is what happened back then: men who wrote those scriptures and just the minds of men, like we have the minds of men today, women, I say, men, humanity, period. — God gave us free will choices. And so, I just feel that that's not how God sees us as women.

P3 responded,

What stood out with me was the faith that she had. She had to risk a lot to come out there to touch his garment. So, she had to have a lot of faith that he would heal her. She had to have a lot of faith that, —, what she was doing wouldn't cause her any harm. So, her faith stood out to me because she had to have a lot of faith, especially back then because they felt that she was unclean. They felt that she shouldn't touch anyone or just say things. And she had the faith to say, — what, this man, this person, this God will heal me. So, what stood out with her best of all because she knew her faith was strong. So that's what stood out with me. The faith that she had in knowing that just to touch him would heal her. So that's a lot of faith.

P2 thoughtfully answered,

Thinking about this passage, I think about her physical challenge; personal suffering, —, isolation did not, —, stop her, but in turn, it increased her determination and her hope. And one young lady mentioned faith and her willpower. So, from there I went into, she had to leap, she had to push as, —, P9 just said, —, if it were me and let me tell you, there have been moments in my life. Cause it hasn't been a straight path, I had to fight myself so that I could surrender more and more to God and decrease. And because, at one point, I thought I knew it all. So — what I'm saying. So, however, —, it was, it was just that I had to totally surrender.

And she was, and she knew she didn't understand that that, —, Jesus could make her whole, she knew, but she had to get there, and I can see her if, just like I would, I'd be knocking people out the way because —, there were some naysayers amongst the crowd who didn't want her to go up front. She didn't want her to be near him or touch him in any way, but she knew what she needed. And she pushed her way through some sisters. I will say probably a lot of sisters were on her side and rallying with her when they were bathing in the village. But yet, and still, I can see her isolated also because there are some who would not embrace and come close. But I can see the older ladies of the village or the town with compassion coming forth.

And, the God wisdom, the wisdom from God, —, to care because we as black women, and I'm not saying other women are not, but I'm talking about black women. We are caretakers. I, we are caregivers. And I think it's a natural thing that comes, —, so it, we were blessed with it, —, no matter who it is, if it's family or it's, —, the kids in the neighborhood or people in the neighborhood.

The last thing I wanted to share was the lack of compassion from other women; many, times hurts more than receiving disrespect or treated like a demon by males, —? And, —, Reverend KC had mentioned in her opening prayer that, —, she wanted to lay it all at his feet. As many of us do, hopefully, all of us do, no matter what, just to lay it there. She knew what she had to do. She knew her

assignment. She knew that for her to be made whole for her to live in his abundance, she had to press on. Thank you.

Before the next question was able to be asked, P7 talked about her struggles.

I was sitting here thinking about whether I had ever had a situation that may have been similar. And I thought about the time when I did have a cycle for 36 days, and I was young and kept going to the same doctor over and over again and kept doing different tests but wasn't doing the right tests. And how one day, he looked at me and said, 'Frankly, I'm tired of trying to figure out what's wrong with you.' And that day, —, and then I called my mother crying because my doctor just told me he was sick of trying to figure out what was wrong with me. And she immediately called another friend whose doctor saw me within 30 minutes and said she needed to get here now based on her symptoms. And within like an hour and a half, I was being cut open for an ectopic pregnancy.

And that was very close to erupting cuz I had been bleeding for a very long time and had been carrying it for a long time. And so, this story kind of reminds me of how, —, when we listened to like the medical profession today and what we know about how they see us as black women, how, how they think we can take more pain than white women can. —, how often we go unbelieving, —, and we know our bodies better than anybody. And we're saying, 'no,' —, we know this isn't right, and we're seeking the answer. And we, and, and we will have doctors say, there's nothing wrong with you. You're just drug-seeking. You're just looking for pain meds or whatever the case is. And so, this story kind of reminds me of what we are still going through as black women, even just in society, and how we're viewed and how we're not taken seriously.

And we have to keep fighting for our own answers. And because we know us better than anybody else can, we know our bodies, and we know, —, our feelings and this, that, and the other. So, —, when I was thinking about how this story could relate to what we're doing right now, —, and I think almost every woman on here probably could have even a medical story or childbirth, how we dying in childbirth and cuz they don't listen when we say that something's wrong, but we have to keep fighting for ourselves just like she did.

P9 then supported P7 and shared her struggles,

I'm touching and agreeing with everybody today, but — this, this touched me. P7's transparency and testimony touch me because I was in a similar type of

situation in that — I was dealing with, — a battle of infertility. I was getting shots to make me ovulate. And that only works if you're not ovulating. I was ovulating like a puppy — for 12 and 13 and 14 eggs at a time. And one ovary got so big that it was the size of a grapefruit in my belly. And it was hurting me bad. And it was pressing. It was causing bleeding. And when I went to the emergency room, you could see this not in my stomach. And when I went to the emergency room, they said my ovary was about to rupture and they had to go in and wanted to do a total hysterectomy.

And I said, 'no, you're not gonna do anything until somebody calls my doctor.' And so, they called my doctor. My doctor told them not to touch me. I'll be there in a minute. Don't touch her. He told them 'don't move her. Don't do anything.' When he came, he said, 'okay, P9, I'm gonna save these ovaries.' He knew what was in it. But when they looked at the scan, they saw something different. Right. —and it speaks to who you have in your corner. It speaks to making noise, to ensure people stand by and give you the care you need and deserve, not what they want to do. And everybody's attitude changed when they found out I have this infertility specialist in Nassau County taking care of that little black girl.

Everybody moved differently. Everybody cleared the way. I had a separate room for him to do a procedure for me. And he saved it. He saved my life, of course, which was more my priority. I never did give birth, but that's right because God allowed me to be a mother anyway. Amen. So, —, I have no issues with how I became a mother. God knew what he was doing with me. And God knew that Aquila and Isaiah were meant to be my children. And so, I bless God, but I remember having all these issues since I was 18; infertility issues, and problems at 18 years of age where they're checking the back of my head for tumors to see if I have a brain tumor.

I mean, scaring me half to death because every time they told you they would check them for something, that's what you had. Right. They were checking for the tumor. In my mind, I had that. If they were checking for cancer, I thought I had cancer. If they would check them for endometriosis, I had everything they checked for. And I didn't have any of those things, but I did have a combination of things that caused problems, but it's a testament to having faith. And I remember getting determined not to have anybody on my team that wasn't speaking positivity. Not to have anybody on my team that wasn't going to help me get through it and preserve my mind as well as my heart and feelings and not be cruel. So, I remember going to, —, —, —, a man of color as my gynecologist. Sister [P7]. And I went to him and told him my problem.

He said, well, you just need to go to get pregnant. If that were the case, I wouldn't even be talking to you. But he, and then he said to me, what's wrong with you — you American women, you have all these issues — and he berated me in the office; but let me tell you what I did. I got up, I put my clothes on, and I left. I reported

him to the better business bureau. I never went back to him. The person who referred me to him, I let her know that we couldn't be cool anymore cuz that didn't make any sense that you were going to somebody like this. And I found people that were advocates for me, my faith, my hope in God. The holy spirit told me where to go when I needed to go, —. I trusted God, and I got the treatment that preserved my life because then you have your priorities do have to change if you don't necessarily get what you want.

So for me, —, you sharing that story. —I've shared this story before, but your sharing that story opened the door for me to share mine tonight. So, I thank you for your transparency, as always. But —I'm just here to tell you that if you're going through anything and people are not listening to you, fire your whole team and get people that will listen. And that's the truth that is real, and be prayerful about it. God will tell you who to allow in, and God will tell you who to get rid of, and he'll do it so quick. It'll make your head spin. And don't be surprised at who he is, who he cuts out of your life. And if you don't move them, if it's not for your best good and not for what God has for your life, guess what? He's gonna move him for you. I'm here to tell you he'll do that too, but you need to have people to undergird you and support you in your endeavors and health. Your health is important. Your health is so important. So, if you're dealing with something for 12 years, whatever your issues, you've been dealing with for 12 years, if you haven't gone to the doctor; go, sis.

When asked the question of what made the “Woman with the Issue of Blood” a Prophetic Activist, P3 responded,

She didn't wait around for anyone to help her. She advocated for herself. She went out and did what she thought was right and took her chances and advocated for herself and, —, took all the precautions that she needed to get to the position where she could touch his garment. So, I think that would make her prophetic because she did it for herself. And also, and also, I guess she got some information from the community as well to help her because, based on her situation, she needed the community to let her know what was going on. And that's when she decided, like, this is my only chance. So, she advocated for herself.

It was clear that the women were fully engaged and making connections between themselves, the biblical characters, and historical characters by P17's desire to go back to the last question and show vulnerability about a personal struggle she is currently experiencing.

Her faith, she was consistent. She was persistent. She moved as everybody said, and she had courage. She wasn't afraid there was a lack. There was no fear. She didn't have any fear. And, —, I just want to piggyback on the last question you mentioned. I, I wasn't able to turn my mic on quick enough in regards to a situation for me for what I've learned from this situation. Although I don't have an issue, —, with bleeding or anything, but I do have an issue with a, —, an unidentified malignant specimen that was found in my breast about a month ago. And you ladies talking about, —the doctors and the things that I went to a doctor, and the first thing he was talking about was radiology chemotherapy. Let's remove the breast. I was like, we're not doing that. Hold up, back it up.

But what I found in speaking to other women that I knew and then hearing tonight, God led me to a whole other hospital, and this is what I want to say. And someone else mentioned, I think [P9] mentioned, that there is a lack of care regarding being a black woman. There is a lack of respect and honor and just treatment. When we walk into a medical facility, really, when we walk anywhere, let's just be real. But specifically with the medical facility. And I literally said to him, I said, 'no, we're not doing that. No, we're not doing that.'

I was just constantly saying that. And the doctor was like, well, 'you have to do something.' So I said, 'well, let me first tell you who I am. I'm a woman of God. I'm a prayer warrior. And I am believing God that I'm gonna be healed.' However, he chooses and decides for this thing to be removed, whether it is miraculous or I have to go under the knife, but we are not going to be talking about this today. And then he was quiet. And then he says, 'well, you have to do something.' So I said, and I'm gonna get a second opinion.' And literally, I spoke to someone who told me about one of the top hospitals in New York, the Sloan Kettering Memorial Cancer Center.

I went to lunch with a sister that I hadn't seen. I never really met her. I met her online, and the Lord said to invite her to lunch. She also had cancer. She mentioned the hospital, and her mentioning that very same hospital was confirmation for me. I reached out to them within a week. I, and this is God, because usually it takes months. They're calling to set up an appointment for me next week. I got my documentation. I asked for all my paperwork and medical history because that's something we do as well. We have to get out information. I read through it what I don't understand. I'm gonna ask questions about it because we cannot depend on man. And God, hallelujah, is the creator. He's the healer. He is great and mighty to be praised. And I'm trusting him every step of the way. But listening to you ladies today, just confirm like, yeah, you gotta move. You gotta move. If they're not in your corner, pick it up, tell them who you are, tell them what you're doing and get out of there. So, I just wanted to say that; praise God.

P17 was supported by all women with amens, hallelujahs, and more stories of Black women's health regarding our faulty medical establishment. One of our two millennial participants, P10, had this to say about black women and healthcare.

I'm a different generation than you all, but unfortunately, —, I had the same issue. I think we can all go around the room and just talk about all the times we were denied medically. But what I'm doing now is, and I wanna encourage all of you to do it when you are going to the doctor, even if —it's not the doctor of your choice when they deny you, tell them to jot down in your chart, that you were denied. That really changes things. When I'm asking for specific testing, and you do not give it to me, say, okay, that's fine, but make sure you jot it in my chart. And I need a copy of it. For whatever reason, —, God forbid something does happen, it's jotted down, and I have on record that you denied me. And, —, that they're shocked because a lot of, again, it's, it's good to be educated in these things, —, and pass the word along because a lot of people, —, patients, especially black women do not know that they have that right to say that.

It's important for us to, —, pass this knowledge along, especially given in today's climate with all of our rights — medical rights and being taken away as women for these girls and women, to know that you do have those rights to be able to. And I mean, that's how they get over on us is because they think we don't know, but moving forward, —, and when — something's wrong or even if you request something, and they say, no, ask them, okay, that's cool, but I need that jotted down. I need you to put that in my file. And I need a copy of it to make sure that they put it down in their file. So, I just wanted to pass that along.

Class Five

The fifth class was held on July 11, 2022. The subject was Womanist Theology because it is an integral part of this project. I thought participants needed to understand Womanist Theology better, even though we had been actively “doing” WT throughout each session. I introduced from Floyd-Thomas's four tenets of Womanist Theology

(WT),⁵ and CA1 asked questions about what they remembered about WT. When asked what stood out from the lesson, the following were some participants' responses. P19 said,

When I went to seminary, I had not heard the term prior to that, but I was so glad to hear it and even talk about it now because — some of my white coworkers, they're like, oh, what's the difference between being a feminist and a womanist. So, it's, I'm just so glad there's a place where we have that intersection of race and gender because we do not have the same concerns and issues; we have extra, we have extra, not only gender, we have our race to go along with it. So, it's a place for us to identify and have a voice and for our issues to be heard.

P6 responded,

What stood out to me, which I think is, —, something that we usually see in most movements, is when there's a lack of representation of what we see here. Mm-hmm, <affirmative> —, in the world that we are bold enough to go and, —, create or embark upon or produce mm-hmm <affirmative>, —, —, where we're, —, we are made in the image of God who is a creator mm-hmm <affirmative>. So, the fact that we don't just take and allow the absence of something that we hold dear to ourselves, but if it's not there, then it's a call on ourselves to be the one to bring it forward. So, I thought that stood out.

P17 expressed,

I have one other thing I wrote about the womanist to feminists and just talked about that. But when —, Reverend Kym said what Alice Walker quoted is that the womanist to feminist is as purple as lavender. And what I got from that was, —, purple being the stronger, dominant, more aggressive female, and the lavender being the, —, the lesser, —, spokesperson, or I don't wanna say weaker, but just lesser in herself, not as, —, dominant based, based on those two colors. That's what I got from purple to lavender.

And P9 posited,

That's right. When I thought purple to lavender, I thought purple was a deep, rich color. So —, royalty can't get purple from lavender, but you get lavender from purple. Like all skin colors come from black, right? So, you can't get it the other way. So, I took us to be the purple and somebody else to be the lavender.

⁵ Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism In Religion and Society* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006), 78.

And when asked about Radical Subjectivity, P7 responded,

It's ingrained in us from a very young age. And I — was on the phone with someone I offered a job to yesterday, and something's been happening where her email keeps getting blocked from my system for some reason. Every time she responds. And as I was talking, I caught myself because I said I spoke to our IT department, and they told me that they fixed the problem and that your email was initially blacklisted, but now it's whitelisted. And, as it came out my mouth and I even said out loud, oh my God, that sounds terrible. And she said, yeah, you're right. It does. And she's a white woman, but it was like, to keep the email, you blacklist emails.

So it keeps them from getting through. And then it's white-listed. Now her emails can get through, and as it was coming out my mouth, it was just a reminder of how many things in our society — the black sheep of the family, —, —, or you go to the grocery store, and you wanna buy nude panty hose. What's in the store is not my kind of nude. —, —, and —, when we look at a map when they're teaching us about the geography, they'll have Africa this small, but they'll have the United States huge, right? We know you can fit at least three United States inside Africa. So, it's just ingrained as early, as a year and a half ago, my very fair skinned mother with freckles —, and I was in a store and someone who was as dark as me, and I was really saddened by it. She was shocked. She's like, you're her mother —? And she was shocked because of the color difference. Ridiculous.

And, and I was like, yeah, —, and I've been dealing with that all of my life, but I did not think that nearly 60 years old, that someone would actually be concerned about this very light-skinned woman is my mother. And — so the colorism amongst us.

CA1 then asked about Traditional Communalism, and one response capsulized the participants' thoughts about this project and the support the group offered. P9 stated,

Is what we're doing right now. And we're supporting each other. We're talking about our ancestors and the things that they've done. We're talking about the changes. We're sharing our experiences, and we're lifting each other, and we are supporting each other through the troubles and through the situations that we've gone through. So — but when she shared her transparency with us, with her situation last week, I, we rallied, we rallied. That's how we do it. That, that's what we're doing. That's a definite example, but support — giving her support, praying from it. I know we all went to praying, supporting, this class; since we've started, that's all we've been doing — supporting each other and uplifting each other and, reflecting on our ancestors, well, the good, the bad and the ugly, right, sharing. And so, my spiritual mother used to say 'true to the meetings about the bones.'

So, we keep the good parts and know what's not good. We are advising each other.

When asked how they could relate to redemptive self-love, the following responses proved that the participants understood the Womanist meaning of self-love. P9 said,

One of the most powerful things I have ever read is, —, how people feel about you is none of your business. That's right. That's it. That's right. How do you feel about yourself as none of your business? I mean, because you have no idea why they feel, how they feel. You have no idea why, and it's not for you to figure out. I love sister Sharon's response. Her confidence makes people, not like her. Insecure people don't like confident people. It's a natural response; they feel uncomfortable because they want that boldness, but they don't have it. And they wish they had it. And she comes in every day. Hey, how's everybody doing? Y'all doing, girl? And they're like, I can't deflate her no matter what I do. I can't take it away. And for a lot of people, male, female, it, what you do is you expose what they're wrestling with. You expose what they want to be. You expose what they're trying to grow into your strength, amplifies their weakness.

P17 responded,

Amen. Because we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against spiritual wickedness in high places. And one of the things, when you talk about self-redemptive love, I teach dance, PE, yoga work weightlifting at a high school. And I tell my students, which my sister just said, 'you are fearfully and wonderfully made.' Now I can't bring my Bible into the public school, but the Bible is in me. So, I can speak over these kids when I walk in the building. I can lay hands on these kids. And that is exactly what I'm doing. And I tell them, there's not another you on the planet. Nobody else can be you better than you can. And I had to. I got that. Self-esteem at a very young age, being a dancer, and having all the competition. But I learned that even before coming to know the Lord, God just gave me more edification and revelation on it to know that I am fearfully and wonderfully made in his image.

No one can be me better than I can. And so, I'm gonna run my race. No competition. What's for me is for me. What's for you, it's for you. And to really, —, teach that to our young people, so they're not trying to compare themselves to others. That's what the media sets up. This is the standard the media sets up. If you don't look this way, you're not beautiful. If you don't, if your body's not like this, you're not. I tell them, 'you are beautiful, right?' Where you are, everybody dances in my class. Nobody is sitting. We gonna teach you how to dance and

build them up. I think that's so important. And we have to do that with our young people.

P17 summarized this class on WT and redemptive self-love, saying,

I think, —, what we've learned regarding our conversation, well, what I've learned in regards to our conversation, is the importance of walking in love and acceptance of every human being on the planet, right? Especially our sisters, especially our sisters and brothers, our young sisters and brothers that we can encourage and edify, but it's really about walking in that love. And sometimes it's very difficult, right? To walk in that love when you're dealing with a difficult person. But I've learned from that experience that a person may never change. My perspective of them changes because I'm walking in love. Mm-hmm <affirmative>, they may never change. They may still be, —, operating from that perspective. But I changed because I say I have to love this person in spite of what they're doing. So, I think that's an overall consensus that we talked about on this line: really loving each other and accepting one another and raising our children to love each other, love one another. And so on.

Implementation

The following are the dates of my project and what happened during each class period.

Sunday, May 15, 2022	Administered the advertisements for classes via email, announcements in church, social media, and word of mouth, met with context and professional associates for planning
Sunday, May 22, 2022	Met with context and professional associates to finalize plans for the project via Zoom, ended enrollment into project. Provided journals to those who wanted a physical journal.
Monday, June 13, 2022	Class 1— Administered the pre-survey questionnaire, taught class on Rizaph, followed by discussion and giving of the journal prompt to participants. Met with CA's after session.
Monday, June 20, 2022	Class 2 – Taught lesson on Ida B. Wells-Barnett followed by discussion and giving of the journal prompt to participants. Met with CA's after session.

Monday, June 27, 2022	Class 3 – Taught lesson on Mamie Till-Mobley followed by discussion and giving of the journal prompt to participants. Met with CA’s after session.
Tuesday, July 5, 2022	Class 4 – Taught lesson on the “Woman with the Issue of Blood” followed by discussion and giving of the journal prompt to participants. Met with CA’s after session.
Monday, July 11, 2022	Class 5 – Taught about Womanist Theology, final journaling exercises given. Met with CA’s after session.
Monday, July 18, 2022	Class 6 – Final discussion with questions. Administered the post-survey questionnaire. This week I, the researcher attempted to collect journals from all participants.
September 1, 2022	Began to evaluate the data.
November 2, 2022	Complete first draft of final document

Because of the pandemic and the summer months approaching, I decided to hold my project online for comfort and the assurance that even if participants were on vacation, they might still participate online. This decision proved valid as many did join the class even while vacationing.

The participants in this study were self-identified and gender-specific Black women. A majority of the women were born in the United States and a few were from various Caribbean countries that had migrated to the United States of America. I advertised this project to women living or working in Valley Stream, New York community. Some participants attended Valley Stream Presbyterian Church (VSPC), and some were the mothers of The W.A.N.T.E.D. Project (TWP) program participants. Others were clients of The Restored Life Group (RLG) or community members referred by other participants or who had heard about the project. The participants, between the ages of twenty-seven and sixty-five, are mothers or “other mothers” who have mothered others through mentoring, work, or family. I did not ask for their ages; however, through the study, I understand that the outlier participants were one twenty-seven-year-old, one

in her mid-thirties, and one forty-year-old. The rest of the participants were in their fifties and above. Also, from class discussions, I found that occupations varied from retirees, ministers, nurse administrators, human resources and development directors, teachers and school administrators, paraprofessionals, and middle managers. All participants were Christians; however, two self-identified as non-churchgoers, and three considered themselves novices regarding Bible competency.

I intended to have twelve participants in case some participants needed to drop out from participating. The ideal number of participants was between six and eight. However, I received twenty affirmative responses and accepted all. The project was six weeks, and each class period was two hours long. The classes began with a five-minute greeting and prayer. Since the classes were online, I did not need to provide snacks and have a longer greeting time than was planned.

I then presented for approximately forty-five to fifty minutes on a biblical or historical figure for the first four classes. The first- and second-class presentations were Rizpah from 2 Sm 21:1-14 and Ida. B. Wells-Barnett. The third- and fourth-class presentations were on Mamie Till-Mobley and the “Woman with the Issue of Blood” from Mark 5:25-34. Finally, I presented Womanist Theology to the group in the last class. The vehicle for all the teachings was PowerPoint.

The Context Associates provided pre-determined questions that were asked during the discussions. Participants took their journals home and were tasked with journaling weekly. They were to be returned at the last class, but many participants needed extra time to get the journals to the Context Associates. I had also planned to give everyone physical journals, but this was more difficult than expected since we were not

meeting physically. Nevertheless, I was pleasantly surprised that most participants responded via technology rather than with physical writing. Even some who did receive a journal chose to type out their journal responses.

Another change was in the last class. Instead of only reviewing the biblical and historical characters with the participants, I had each participant introduce themselves because there we found so many overlaps with the participants' employment histories through our discussions. Many were teachers of special needs children and youth. A few were senior-level executives, and many were ministers. With the introductions, I believe they could reach out to each other for further support in their respective areas, which has happened in some cases. I wondered if I should have started with introductions to help build group cohesion. In this case, it did not seem necessary. I believe that with the characters presented at the beginning of each class and then sharing stories in relation, first to the characters and then personal faith stories, it was inevitable that the group would find cohesion.

The final change was the addition of questions in the last class. I was interested in which class impacted the participants the most. The answers were varied, but many liked Mamie Till-Mobley and the Woman with the issue of blood, who were the two add-on characters in this project. I also asked how it was to share personal stories with the group and gained more insight into whether the project was successful.

Stakeholders

My Context Associate, Ms. Marsha Guerrier, could not fulfill her duties for this project because of the change of dates and summer schedules. Therefore, Ms. Miriam

Milord replaced her. In addition, Rev. Catina Blackmon Jackson was replaced as a peer associate under the advisement of our mentor so that students behind us would be given a chance to see the process they would one day go through. Rev. Rodney Lynch replaced Rev. Blackmon Jackson. Below are Ms. Milord's and Rev. Lynch's biographies.

Contributors: Peer Associates

Reverend Rodney James Lynch, M.Div., STM, currently serves as Pastor – Executive Director of the Baptist Student Foundation (The Found) at Purdue University. Rev. Lynch received his undergraduate liberal arts degree in Social Science from The College of New Rochelle. Rev. Lynch earned his Master of Divinity degree and a Master of Sacred Theology from Drew University School of Theology. Rodney is now pursuing a Doctor of Ministry (DMin) at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. His focus is: “Racial At-one-ment as Prophetic Activism: Growing The ‘Kindom’ of God through Conciliation.” Rev. Lynch brings over twenty years of prophetic ministry experience to The Found. He is a dedicated and committed servant of Jesus Christ who informs him to “Do Justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God.” Fighting against all forms of oppression through the lens of the “Religion of Jesus” is where Rodney's beliefs are anchored.

Ms. Olivette Cumberbatch is a member of the Valley Stream Presbyterian Church (VSPC). She has been a full member since 2014. She was ordained as a Deacon at VSPC in 2015 and then an Elder in 2018. Ms. Cumberbatch serves faithfully in the ministry of Jesus Christ at VSPC. In addition, she works as an Occupational Therapist at St. Francis

De Sales School For The Deaf. Olivette will be the liaison for my project handling primarily administrative tasks during the six weeks of classes.

Contributors: Context Associate

Ms. Miriam Milord was born and raised in the Bronx, New York, in a loving family. She is a member of the Powerhouse Church of God in Christ in Roosevelt, New York. Miriam is an Administrative Assistant at Powerhouse and Valley Stream Presbyterian Church and is a consultant with the United Women of Faith Organization. Miriam graduated with an International Business degree and desires to help others in ministry and mission work. She has also spent over twenty-five years serving mothers, children, and families in the social service arena. She is a proud mother of a Howard University student.

Contributors: Professional Associates

The Rev. Dr. Alvan N. Johnson, Jr. has over forty-five years of pastoral experience. At his last assignment, he pastored Bethel AME Church in Bloomfield, Connecticut, for twenty-nine years, helping to erect a \$2.5 million edifice.⁶ Dr. Johnson has served on many councils, such as the Congress of the National Council of Churches, the Urban League, National Black Churches, the Connectional Social Action Commission of the AME Church, and past Board President of the Capital Region

⁶ “Bethel A.M.E. Church,” Church Files, November 1, 2021, <https://bethelamebloomfield.org/index.php/history/>.

Conference of Churches and other social justice projects.⁷ He will provide his expertise in social justice and prophetic activism.

The Rev. Dr. Terrlyn L. Curry Avery is the creator of Pastology, “the cutting-edge field that focuses on the synergy between pastoring and psychology.”⁸ She has earned a Ph.D. from Hofstra University and a Master of Divinity degree from Yale University.⁹ Dr. Curry Avery is a licensed psychologist exceeding twenty years of experience, where she worked with children, adults, couples, and families for their therapeutic needs.¹⁰ “She has a passion for working with women and helping them to improve their well-being while simultaneously exploring their relationships with the sacred and with others.”¹¹ She will assist with her knowledge about working with Black women in her pastology work and will be a great asset to my project.

The Rev. Dr. Jamesetta Ferguson is Senior Pastor at St. Peter’s United Church of Christ, located within Louisville’s largest housing project in the Russell Neighborhood.¹² She is also an Adjunct Professor at Louisville Presbyterian Seminary, a board member with the Indiana Kentucky Conference of United Church of Christ, and leads M.O.L.O. Village C.D.C., whose mission is to transform, empower, and renew the lives of those

⁷ “The Connecticut Council for Interreligious Understanding,” <https://ccfiu.org/wcp-panel>.

⁸ “Sacred Intelligence, Deepening Your Sacred, Selfish and Shared Journeys,” <https://www.sacredintelligence.com/>.

⁹ “Sacred Intelligence, Deepening Your Sacred, Selfish and Shared Journeys,” <https://www.sacredintelligence.com/>.

¹⁰ “Sacred Intelligence, Deepening Your Sacred, Selfish and Shared Journeys,” <https://www.sacredintelligence.com/>.

¹¹ Terrlyn L. Curry Avery, “LinkedIn,” <https://www.linkedin.com/in/dr-terrylyn-l-curry-avery>.

¹² “Points of Light,” <https://www.pointsoflight.org/awards/rev-jamesetta-ferguson/>.

whom they serve through education, community service, advocacy, and healthy living.¹³

The vision of M.O.L.O. Village is to “support the growth of healthy, engaged, and productive residents prepared to take their families and their neighborhood on a path to prosperity.”¹⁴ Its inclusive village consists of five “hamlets” (or programmatic areas), each focusing on areas that help community residents prosper.¹⁵ She will share her knowledge about community-building, working with Black women, and meeting community needs.

Summary of Learning

After six weeks of classes, the expected results of this project were for the participants to feel a deep connection to their faith and prophetic activist legacies by sharing stories of Biblical and Black Historical women. I also expected that participants would 1) Learn about mothers or “othermothers” who changed the lives of their communities because they had to defend the lives of their children; 2) Gain self-esteem and support by talking about their faith stories and tragedies with other Black women; 3) Would feel empowered to see themselves as prophetic activists turning their thoughts and passions into actions that help their communities.

The following chart pertains to the first three questions on the pre- and post-questionnaire and their results.

¹³“Louisville/Jefferson County Landbank Newsletter,” <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/KYLOUISVILLE/bulletins/2c55f06>.

¹⁴ “Molo Village CDC,” <https://www.molovillagecdc.org/the-future-village>.

¹⁵ “Molo Village CDC,” <https://www.molovillagecdc.org/the-future-village>.

Participant #	Pre-Questionnaire	Post-Questionnaire	Pre-Questionnaire	Post-Questionnaire	Pre-Questionnaire	Post-Questionnaire
	Have participants heard the term Prophetic Activism before the study, and did they have a good understanding of what it was?	Could participants define Prophetic Activism succinctly after the study?	Could the participant name any prophetic activists as defined by this study?	Could participants name any prophetic activists according to this study that was not included in the study?	Have participants participated in any Black female-only support groups?	Would participants participate in a Black female-support group after this study?
1	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
2	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
3	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
4	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
5	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
6	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
7	No	Yes	No	No answer.	No	Yes
8	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
9	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
10	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
11	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
12	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
13	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
14	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	How am I defining support group?	No
15	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
16	Dropped from study before 1 st day	0	0	0	0	0
17	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
18	No	Yes	Yes	No answer.	No (changed to yes in post-questionnaire)	Yes
19	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

20	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
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According to the above chart, thirteen out of the nineteen participants needed to learn or have a more precise definition of Prophetic Activism. However, after the classes and according to the post-questionnaire, everyone could explain Prophetic Activism well. Previous to the study, the pre-questionnaire indicates that twelve out of the nineteen participants could not identify anyone who was a PA; however, afterward, all could name Prophetic Activists. In addition, the pre-questionnaire indicated that thirteen out of the nineteen participants had participated in a female Black Women's support group. When asked if they would participate again in a female Black women's group, all except one said yes, they would. The one participant who said "no" asked how I defined "support group." In retrospect, I should not have assumed that "support group" would mean the same thing to everyone and should have defined it for this study so it could be readily understood.

Participant responses to questions four and five on the pre- and post-questionnaires further demonstrate that participants felt empowered to embrace their legacies of prophetic activism.

Pre-Questionnaire Response	Post Questionnaire Response
P1 – "I have heard stories of different black women in history, but not many. I have not made any changes in my life due to stories of black women in history."	P1 – "Hearing stories of black women in history gave me a passion that I didn't even know existed. It brought awareness that I probably tried to suppress because it makes me angry to learn about these women who went through and have seen so much evil and hatred to the African-American community, to be living currently, dealing with the same evil and hatred but transformed to modern day and times. To still have to have discussions with our youth of color to tell them how to walk, talk, and dress, so they won't have a target on their back and make it home to their families alive. It puts a passion in you to want to get more involved to give my support and get involved with the uplifting of my community."
P3 – "By hearing the stories, it made me aware of the obstacles I	P3 – "Learning about black women in history helped me to prioritize my time and get more involved in the African American communities."

<p>might face and it made me work hard to become successful.”</p> <p>P4 – “Sometimes I find it stressful because I compare myself to them and create an internal competition.”</p> <p>P6 – “Hearing the story of Madam CJ Walker inspired me to believe that I can do whatever I put my mind to and become a successful entrepreneur. With that, it inspires me to become more focused on my dreams and goals.”</p> <p>P7 – “Basically, their stories let me know that anything is possible with faith and perseverance.”</p> <p>P9 – “I have found the many stories of black women in history, inspiring, thought-provoking as well as challenging. They pushed me to keep pressing and keep striving because of all they had to endure.”</p> <p>P12 – “They have motivated me to stop at nothing in creating the life that I envision for myself.”</p> <p>P15 – “It has empowered me to realize that I have so many more advantages than historical women,</p>	<p>P4 – “Hearing the stories have only confirmed for me to continue to do the philanthropic work I have done and will continue to do. I enjoy helping my community even in the smallest way.”</p> <p>P6 – “It reminded me of how resilient, creative, and bold we are and can be. Hearing the stories has helped me to be more intentional about using my gifts for the greater good.”</p> <p>P7 – “It served as a reminder that within me lies that same great fortitude as our examples in this course.”</p> <p>P9 – “Hearing the stories makes me want to do more, learn more, and be more. I am inspired to go higher because of these stories. I am also more patient with myself when I hear about their struggles and triumphs.”</p> <p>P12 – “It’s helped me realize that when you focus on the good, the good can only get better, and that cynicism is only doing a disservice to yourself. It has also affirmed how strong we are as Black women on both an individual and collective level and to stop at nothing to achieve the life that you want.”</p> <p>P15 – “It has helped to see that I still have so much to do, so much for impact that I am capable of, and I am now having to take an inventory of what I am doing what else God may be calling me to do. I am also beginning to feel more confident and empowered to be/do more because these women have shown me that if they can do it, so can I.”</p>
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<p>so I must honor their efforts by trying harder.”</p> <p>P17 – “Hearing stories of Black women has increased my faith in knowing that God is no respecter of persons and has given me boldness to step out on things that may seem impossible to me.”</p> <p>P18 – “Their testimonies motivate and inspire me.”</p> <p>P19 – “Hearing these stories allows me to know that nothing is impossible. It is possible that I too can be used as an instrument to bring about justice, to right some wrongs and to be Jesus’ hands and feet in the world.”</p>	<p>P17 – “Hearing about these remarkable stories of these remarkable, anointed, and faithful women has encouraged me to keep fighting the good fight of faith and giving up is never an option in life!”</p> <p>P18 – “Their stories have further encouraged me to stand strong for justice in the face of adversity and not to be dissuaded from the pursuit of justice when I can make a difference.”</p> <p>P19 – “Hearing the stories of Black women in history ignited a fire inside of me to want to right some wrongs. The stories make me want to be about it and not just talk about it. It makes me want to gather together/organize with other Black women to stand up against racism and discrimination, to demand changes be made in this country’s policing practices that are imbued with structural racism; practices that allow unarmed Black men and women to be gunned down, lynched, asphyxiated, and killed with not accountability. These stories helped change my mindset because the more things change the more, they stay the same. Black mothers have been crying out about the killing of their children throughout history with no real change. I feel an urgency to do what Jesus taught in regards to justice and evaluate my own thinking and understanding according to scripture.”</p>
<p>P4 – “I have been very reluctant to share. I don’t want to be judged.”</p> <p>P8 – “I don’t share my story. I am invited, and the Holy Spirit says to share.”</p>	<p>P4 – “Hearing the lessons from Pastor Kym and listening to the other women that spoke, did I feel out of place because of the references to the Bible. I am a religious person, but could not quote the Bible verses, and this group intimidated me even to speak because I am not that familiar with the specific verses in the Bible. Feeling this way about my experience has led me to question why I no longer read my Bible daily and how to apply the teachings in my everyday life. I do struggle with the book, and its teachings because many of the stories conflict with my belief system, currently.”</p> <p>P8 – “Sharing my own story reminded me I am not alone.”</p>

P15 – “It has helped me to realize that I have more in common with others and it has prompted me to be kinder.”	P15 – “It has helped me to realize that I have more in common with others than I think and that these common bonds can be the cornerstone of a great support network for whatever comes next in our life’s journeys.”
P17 – “Sharing for me always increases my faith.”	P17 – “It is a reminder to me of how awesome God is and how He showed up on my behalf and moved miraculously. If He did it before He can do it again!”

Although I feel that the participants in this study have testified to the support, esteem, and the claimed prophetic activist legacies, the following are more specific. P9 said,

Each generation, as P14 said, has to leave it better than how we found it. Right? And, and so, — my hope is that because we are now talking, we are taking the reins, it’s got to keep getting better. I have the audacity to believe that with every generation, it gets better. Otherwise, we don’t have any hope, — And you can’t move forward without it. You gotta have it to move. I believe that when we do this right here, it makes us better. I’m leaving here changed right now. And I’m equipped to handle whatever it is I need to do regarding something like this. So, I appreciate this forum and the wisdom because it’s helping me be better so I can help somebody else be better.

P17 offered,

We gotta be mindful of our words. Ladies, listen, our words have power and I hear what you’re saying; but the devil is a liar. Let’s go there. And one of the things, I’m a prayer warrior. I decree, I declare and I’m part of prayer groups. And we are praying without ceasing about this nation, about this country, about this government, about these policies. And know God is still in control. I know what it may look like. And that’s what I’m standing on. And so, I just wanted to just say, we gotta be really mindful of our words. Mm-hmm <affirmative> because we will have what we say. Mm-hmm <affirmative> our words have power. We have authority and dominion, and we should subdue the earth. We have authority, the same authority that Jesus had, he gave us. And so, we gotta be real meticulous and, and mindful of what we say mm-hmm <affirmative> amen

P18 stated,

And I think that this is what community is about — sharing information and so that you can go out and, —, be stronger and wiser. Right. That's what the community is to me. —, the sharing that came out of this one.

After P17 shared that she has breast cancer and is going for treatment, P19 said,

P17, I just wanna encourage you back in 2018, I was diagnosed with, —, breast cancer, and didn't know where to go. And I'm in the survivorship program now. Not saying that you gonna need any of that. Amen.

Yeah. Subject radical subjectivity. I'm the first one female in my, I was the first one to, —, graduate from college. I was the first one to graduate from the grad school; the first one to do a lot of different things, but I definitely was the only female to answer the call to, to preach and answer the call to gospel. And the first person that put up the roadblock was my mom, —, and what made it so ridiculous was, —, and yeah, I love my mom. My mom was like, I don't like woman preachers.

She was the one that was, 'why can't you just do this? Why can't you just sing a song? Why can't you just teach?' And, and —, and all of us that are, that carry this assignment, —, we don't wanna do this. —, if I could just do that, I would've just been doing that. —, I had to do what I was called to do. —, and I had adversity, —, the people that said they loved me, people that said they would support. And when God started doing a work and God started, —, showing himself through, —, the ministry that he planted in me, they turned, they, kissed me on the cheek and took their silver, —, but we thank God.

We thank God that, —, —, someone paved the way for us to be where we are and we hold each other up and pull each other. I thank God for the leadership that I have, —, with regard to this walk. But I think all of us who are even there to even discuss or have these conversations, I think we are all part of it. And we all are learning how to love ourselves, better, be better. —, have more confidence. Every time I leave this group, I feel better about myself and I feel better about all of, —, going into prayer and lifting each other up. So, I think we're all part of that whole thing. So, it's all of us. I see it in every single person right now in this class.

CA 2 then asked the participants two additional questions that helped further prove my hypothesis. The first question was, "How did sharing your personal stories in this group feel?" P17 replied with scripture, "We overcome by the blood of the lamb and

the word of our testimony.' I know that for me, anytime I share, it's a freeness, it's a confidence, it's releasing any fear or doubt. So, it's freeing."

P9 stated,

P6 said it. This is, was a safe space. —, I never hesitated to share and I considered it an honor and a privilege to hear everyone else share. I was honored to hear about sister P7's situation. I was honored to hear about your situation since every single person here, —, pretty black P3. I was honored to hear about her situation. Amen. —, because you see, I didn't add another name to the name. Right. So, —, which, and she shared that just as innocently and so open and transparent and, and so beautifully. And it, everybody shared beautiful things and scary things and personal things and private things. And for me, it's an honor and a privilege to hear when people share and I lock it up for me, —, I may share the story, the name won't be attached, but it'll, it'll go to a sister that needs to hear what God has brought you through. Right. —, cuz that's the purpose of us sharing is to encourage one another.

P3 replied,

And also sharing helps you relate to other people, maybe something that the other person is going through the same thing. What they testimony can help you. Mm-hmm <affirmative> what you're going through. And —, I think P18 is right. It's a way of, —, cleansing, definitely what you're going through. Like, oh my God, I went through this, but —, this person went through this and they, they overcame it. Right. How can I overcome like they did? So, it can encourage you to step out of your comfort zone and do better. Mm-hmm <affirmative> So, —, I feel that, —, sharing your personal, —, challenges can be beneficiary to other people as well as cleansing to you.

P9 responded,

Yes. And I definitely appreciated the younger ladies here. I'm gonna have to call 'em out, P12 and P10, and P1, who gave us other aspects and other views and other things that we, we didn't think about until they dropped it into the arena. —, I appreciate the diversity of this panel when it comes to age and experience and even livelihood, because I am better because of sharing with you. I'm not saying it just to be saying it. I'm a better woman for spending six weeks with you. I'm determined all the time when I teach a class that I want people to be changed. And, and I am changed because I have this experience with you guys. And so, —, I appreciate you, and I have to say it again. I thank you guys so much because this really helped me. It really did. Yeah.

P5 added, “I just wanna add that. I think that I agree with you, —, P9, that the younger generation have so much to offer and to bring to the table that we can learn so much from them. —? —, my nieces, I have a lot of nieces, and I learn so much from them and it’s, —, it’s interesting that how many things they can bring to the table and shed light to.”

P9 supported the younger members of the group,

Cause these two, we have these two ladies, P12 and P10, Hey, they’re powerhouses. I mean, powerhouses already, and I’m telling you, I remember when I was a P12 and a P10, and I appreciate that you, that the moms who are on here that can take credit for all these daughters who are here with you, something to be said that your daughters want to be with you in a class or in a, on a project like this. I mean, this is just awesome —and I do a lot, my church. So, I’m gonna be calling you guys. Don’t be surprised if I reach out to you because our young ladies need to see you. Our young ladies need to hear you. —, I love the campaign. If you can see her, you can be her. If I see her, I can be her. I can see P12. I can be P12. If I see a P10, I can be a P10. —, know if I see a P1, I could be a P1, —, I want people to see these young ladies. And so, for me, I’ll take away my mantle and my responsibility to make sure that they’re seen and make sure that they’re heard.

P3 spoke about how Black women must support one another,

I think as black women, we need to encourage each other. I think that we need to network to convey certain things that we learn or, —, to help the next person, —to —, network, to give, give, and exchange information, and to help one another. I think that we should all, —, be there for each other kids and, —, give information about different schools and different programs and, —, things, —, that can help your community. Share it. A lot of time people don’t share things within their community. Anytime I know anything, time I hear anything, I know anything I’m sharing with everybody. And a lot of people’s like, oh, no, I don’t wanna let nobody know because then everybody’s gonna be there. But no, —, you have to share with one another. We have to encourage one another. We have to love each other. And I think that’s one of the most important things that, —, for a black woman, we need to learn to do.

The last question that CA2 asked was, “Okay, so having said all that, would you participate in another black Woman's group?” P3 said, “With these people or somebody

else?” “We’re used to each other. We don’t want nobody else?” said P3. P9 added,

“Sure. I would absolutely. I could never learn enough.”

P18 responded,

When I started at my church in Women’s Ministry, I had no experience with women. And [my pastor] said, you’ll be just fine. Well, sometimes when you take these assignments, I mean, it took me closer to my nieces. Cause I didn’t understand the whole dynamic of women, emotion, whatever —? I manage thirty guys on a trading desk. And so, with my guys, we could fuss at each other, tell each other off, and they were like, boss, lady, what do you want for lunch? The women would be all in the corner, emotional. And I didn’t know what to do. I was called into human resources, and they said, we notice you have no women.

So, when you say a women’s group, it’s been very interesting. It’s been an interesting journey, and I certainly appreciate the diversity in all that I’ve learned on this, —, within this project. But sometimes, when I hear it, alarms go up. Just nervous only because of my history. But it has been appreciated and I would do it.

P7 stated,

P18 and I are a part of the same tribe. <laugh> <laugh> I hear you. I, as a general rule, I don’t do too many women type things. —, and I think that’s a trust issue for me and, —? And so, this was quite a challenge for me, —, in the beginning, but I did end up enjoying it. I’m glad I had this experience because it kind of softened me up a little bit, but I’m part of P18’s tribe. <laugh> I’m an HR director, so I see a lot of differences in emotion as well. I might would hire men all day if I just had to work with them under me. So just to avoid all of that, —, —, but I’m <laugh>, but I am changing for sure. I hire women every day, but I can’t say that —sometimes I like what comes with some of us in the workplace.

Concluding this last section of the project, P13 said, “I will say I agree. This was, —, a different experience for me. And, —, I definitely appreciated it. I do keep to myself a lot because of past trauma. But I’m opening up. I’m getting there.” P9 stated, “Yeah, I would do it. Mm-hmm <affirmative> I’m the head of the women’s ministry in my church. So, it’s refreshing to be taught when you’re called on so many times to teach mm-hmm <affirmative>. So, this was very good for me.” P3 said, “I think it was a little easy because of the group, the dynamics of the group. The people that were in the group

made it easier to open up and share.” P9 and P5, in unison, “I agree.” P13 agreed, and so did P17, “I agree too.”

P17 offered our closing prayer, which concluded our time together perfectly,

Hallelujah, Lord, father, God, we just bless your name and we praise you this night, father God, I thank you for every woman on this line. I thank you for Reverend Kym. And in this facilitation that she has brought to us, father God. God, we lift up each person and family represented on this line. Father, God, I speak healing because you are Jehovah Rafa. You are the God that heals father God, things that were shared. Things that weren't shared. Father God, —, every situation and circumstance that pertains to each of us from the crown of our head to the souls of our feet, father God, I thank you that we are courageous, that we are bold, hallelujah, that we are beautifully created in your image, father God. And that we are walking in health and prospering in, in our mind soul body.

As third, John speaks, that you would wish above all that we would prosper and be in good health. And so, I decree and declare that over our lives, father, God, I thank you that we are not drawing back, but we are drawing nigh to you, father God that you are leading and guiding us. I thank you for the anointing that destroys every yolk because sickness and disease does not have a right to be in our body. And I cancel the assignment from the enemy, father, God, you are a God that heals. And when it has the, when it's the open door in some capacity, however it has arise. We speak to it, decree it, cancel its assignment, Father God, and send it back to the pit of hell. And once it came so that we can live long and strong father, God, your word says that you give us 70 plus what is it?

How many score you give us? But you even give us a hundred and a hundred years. Your word says that you would give us, you would add as, as Hezekiah asked for more years, father, God, we wanna live long and strong. I personally wanna see three digits hallelujah in my right frame of mind, father God, with my faculties, working in the name of the Lord, Jesus, I speak long life on this line to every woman here, father God, I thank you, father God, that you are the creator of all things and that nothing has taken you by surprise. And so even as I pray, not only for my own healing, I, I lift up my sisters here. I thank you for this community of women, hallelujah, that we have come together, that we are growing and learning and edifying and encouraging one another father, God continue to purge us father God, to make us more like you, father God.

So that we look like you. We sound like you. We talk like you. We walk like you, that we are truly your ambassadors in the earth. And how can we be your ambassador if sickness is among us. So, I come against it now and we say we are healed. And even if we go through the process, it's all testimony. Just like my sister shared. It's a testimony to show that we too can overcome. And so, I thank

you that we are more than conquerors. Hallelujah. We are overcomers and we lead. We are led by your spirit and we thank you that you take us by the hand and we bind the hand of the enemy and come against every weapon that is formed, that it will not prosper father in Jesus' name. I pray. Amen and amen. Hallelujah.

Conclusion

According to my hypothesis, this project proved that when Black women gather around stories of overcoming obstacles in their lives, they feel supported by one another and begin to see each other in their accounts. Participants saw that they shared many experiences, and if one could be a prophetic activist by speaking truth to power to the ills of society, they could also do that. The faith stories were a catalyst for gathering. The stories of Rizpah, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, The Woman with the Issue of Blood, and Mamie Till-Mobley empowered participants to see their own stories with theirs. Participants acknowledged the every day strains within the Black community. They re-remembered that they speak truth to power in their daily interactions at home, work, church, school, and communities. By the end of the six weeks, many saw themselves as prophetic activists in the making. Like the Biblical and Historical women I presented, participants understood that these women worked within their communities, around their circumstances, and changed entire communities, even the world. This project was invaluable to many of the participants in the study.

This past week I was celebrated for my ministry at Valley Stream Presbyterian Church. Eleven of the nineteen participants, and two Context Associates were in attendance. Although many participants did not know each other before the study and had not been in touch after the study, they recognized each other and embraced. Some had side conversations, and all took a picture together. Although I was not privy to the

conversations, I was aware that they were rallying around P17, who divulged that she had been diagnosed with Breast Cancer during the study. Although Zoom was efficient and met the project's and the participant's needs, being in person would have been even more powerful, as evidenced by the participants at the celebration. They were able to offer P17 support through physical touch.

Since the study, I have been approached by five women who participated who asked if we could meet again. They said they enjoyed it, making them think about others more than themselves. They liked the sisterhood, the sharing, and learning about their foremothers and would love an opportunity to continue the conversations. I will explore using these support/educational groups in my work with women.

I have learned that even when Black women do not remember a definition, they show their understanding through conversations, not unlike our womanist sisters before us. The participants put their faith into action, not academically, although many were stellar academicians, but with confidence and a sense of justice for their children and communities. Women-centered networks are critical to Black women because these discussions revolve around healing, support, and creativity. These discussions bring healing to each other and communities, the land in Rizpah's context.

If I had to do the project again, I would consider using other questions in my pre- and post-questionnaire than numbers six, seven, and eight. For example, question six was, "What are some events in your life, traumatic or otherwise, that changed your life for the good or bad?" The participants answered this question the same in the pre- and post-questionnaire, which did not shed light on the hypothesis question. Additionally, many of the answers were given during the discussion periods and thus were not needed

as a question. I would also consider not using questions seven or eight because they were similar. Question seven was, “What problems in your community could you see yourself addressing in the Valley Stream community and surrounding areas,” and question eight was, “What programs or services do you think are lacking in your community?” The participants answered number eight by saying they had responded to it in question seven; therefore, it was a redundant question.

I intend to continue working on this project by researching the link between Black women, faith stories, prophetic activism, and leading groups of Black women so they can have an outlet to talk about important issues and gain support in their prophetic activism endeavors. There is much work to do with Black women and their promise to make better families and communities. In the future, I would like to delve deeper into Prophetic Activism and possibly offer another definition. This field is still burgeoning and needs to continue to be written about and taught. I would also like to continue to think about Black women and prophetic activism that leads to social entrepreneurship. Madam CJ Walker and many like her started businesses because of the lack within their communities. Again, Black women are “making a way out of no way” and creating the answers for themselves and others within their communities.

APPENDIX A

CONSENT LETTER, PERMISSION, AND CONSENT FORMS

**Kymberley Clemons-Jones
Student – United Theological Seminary
Research Study**

Key Information About the Researcher and This Study

Study Title: Encouraging Black Women to Embrace Their Legacy of Prophetic Activism Through the Sharing of Faith Stories of Prophetic Women

Principal Investigator: Kymberley Clemons-Jones, MEd in Counseling and MDiv., United Theological Seminary

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Anthony Everett, Doctorate in Ministry, United Theological Seminary

You are invited to take part in a research study. This form contains information to help you decide whether to join the study.

Key Information:

The purpose of the study is to encourage Black women to embrace their legacy of Prophetic Activism. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to attend six one-hour, and forty-five-minute classes over six weeks. Each class will take place Monday evenings from 7:00 pm – 8:45 pm.

- Risks or discomforts from this research include the emotional impact of listening to or sharing stories about hardships.
- The direct benefits of your participation are to share your faith stories and to gain support from other Black women.

Taking part in this research project is voluntary. You do not have to participate, and you can stop at any time. Please read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to join this research project.

Purpose of this Study

To find out if Black women who participate in female (gender-specific), faith-based group meetings to share culturally relevant stories of faith overcoming hardships, and to learn about prophetic biblical and historical women, if they will then be encouraged to make sustainable social impacts in their communities.

Who Can Participate in the Study?

Who can take part in this study? Gender-specific females between the ages of 27 and 65 who identify as Black or African-Americans and who have been mothers or

“other mothers” (women who have helped raise children in their family or their communities).

How many people are expected to take part in this study? There will be approximately twelve participants in total.

Information About Study

Participation: What will happen in this study?

The study will take place online via Zoom.

- Activities for each class will include an opening prayer, a teaching on either a female biblical or historical figure and a group discussion about participants faith journey, and a closing prayer.
- Data collection procedures will be a pre- and post-questionnaire, group discussions, video-recording, observation, and journaling.

How much of my time will be needed to take part in this study?

Participants will be asked to attend one class, per week for six weeks. Additionally, participants will be given a question at the end of each class period to take home and journal their answer. These journals will be collected at the end of the study. In total, each participant will spend approximately two hours and thirty minutes per week for this project.

Information About Study Risks and Benefits

What risks will I face by taking part in the study? What will the researchers do to protect me against these risks?

Participants will be discussing issues related to race and gender, which could be sensitive topics. The pre-questionnaire will also ask participants for examples of racism and gender inequality that might bring up negative emotions. The immediate risks could be the emotions that come up.

The researchers will try to minimize these risks by providing participants with counseling resources, in written form, at every class meeting.

You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

Because this study collects information about you, [one of the risks/the primary risk] of this research is a loss of confidentiality. See the section “Protecting and Sharing Research Information” of this document for more information on how the study team will protect your confidentiality and privacy.

How could I benefit if I take part in this study? How could others benefit?

You may benefit by learning about women Prophetic Activists and from the discussions that follow. You could also benefit from the collegial support between participants. It is possible that you may not receive any personal benefits from

being in this study. However, others may benefit from the knowledge gained from this study.

Ending the Study

If I want to stop participating in the study, what should I do?

You are free to leave the study at any time. If you leave the study before it is finished, there will be no penalty to you. If you decide to leave the study before it is finished, please tell one of the persons listed in the “Contact Information.” If you choose to tell the researchers why you are leaving the study, your reasons may be kept as part of the study record. The researchers will keep the information collected about you for the research unless you ask us to delete it from our records. If the researchers have already used your information in a research analysis, it will not be possible to remove your information.

Financial Information

Will I be paid or given anything for taking part in this study? You will receive no compensation for your participation in the study.

Protecting and Sharing Research Information

How will the researchers protect my information? Researchers will use a coding system, for example, where participants are identified with a number instead of a name for their journaling exercises. The researcher will not know whose journal she is reading because there will only be numbers assigned. All documents, videos, and writings will be kept in a locked file cabinet to support confidentiality.

Who will have access to my research records?

There are reasons why information about you may be used or seen by the researchers or others during or after this study. Examples include:

- University, government officials, study sponsors or funders, auditors, and/or the Institutional Review Board (IRB) may need the information to make sure that the study is done in a safe and proper manner.

What will happen to the information collected in this study?

We will not keep your name or other information that can identify you directly.

The results of this study could be published in an article or presentation but would not include any information that would let others know who you are without your permission.

Will my information be used for future research or shared with others?

We may use or share your research information for future research studies. If we share your information with other researchers, it will be de-identified, which means that it will not contain your name or other information that can directly identify you. This research may be similar to this study or completely different. We will not ask for your additional informed consent for these studies.

Contact**Information: Who can I contact about this study?**

Please contact the researchers listed below to obtain more information about the study.

- Ask a question about the study procedures
- Report an illness, injury, or other problem (you may also need to tell your regular doctors)
- Leave the study before it is finished
- Express a concern about the study

Principal Investigator: Kymberley Clemons-Jones

Email: kmclemonsjones1@united.edu

Phone: [REDACTED]

Context Associate: Olivette Cumberbatch

Email: olivettedcumberbatch@gmail.com

Phone: [REDACTED]

Context Associate: Miriam Milord

Email: miriammilord2208@gmail.com

Phone: [REDACTED]

Your Consent**Consent/Assent to Participate in the Research**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. I/We will give you a copy of this document for your records and I/we will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I understand what the study is about and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study.

Print Legal Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date of Signature (mm/dd/yy): _____

Consent to use of video recordings, audio recordings or photographs for publications, presentations, or for educational purposes.

I give permission for audio recordings/video recordings/photographs made of me as part of the research to be used in publications, presentations, or for educational purposes.

_____ Yes

_____ No

Print Legal Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date of Signature (mm/dd/yy): _____

APPENDIX B

PROJECT FLYER AND WEEKLY AGENDAS

Doctoral Project with Pastor
Kymberley Clemons-Jones

ENCOURAGING BLACK WOMEN TO EMBRACE THEIR LEGACY OF PROPHETIC ACTIVISM THROUGH SHARING THE FAITH STORIES OF PROPHETIC WOMEN



ONLINE

6 Classes 7:00 - 8:45 pm

Dates: June 13, June 20, June 27

July 5, July 11, July 18

Activities include: Learning about the prophetic works of Rizpah, the Woman with the Issue of Blood, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, and Mamie Till, group discussion, journaling. Journals will be provided by the researcher.

Criteria for participants

Women who identify as Black or African American Mothers and "Other" Mothers (mothers who have mothered children in their families or communities)

Please contact

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Rev. Kymberley Clemons-Jones
Facilitator

Agenda for June 13, 2022
 Rev. Kymberley Clemons-Jones
 Doctoral Project
 United Theological Seminary

1. Welcome and Prayer
2. Time commitment, make sure all questionnaires and consent forms are in
3. Introduce context associates
4. Explain project – hypothesis, research methods, and definition of prophetic activism
5. Teach about Rizpah
6. 50-minute group discussion
7. Explain journaling and give the prompt question

Research Methods

1. Pre- and post-questionnaires
2. 50-minute group discussion
3. Observations of participants
4. Take home journaling exercises

50-minute discussions

(Things to observe)

1. Facial expressions when discussing topics
2. Positive and negative expressions of being in a black and female-only group.
3. Was sharing stories of struggle easy or difficult for participants? Use names but then assign their numbers.
4. Do they sound like they have a desire to be involved in the community?
5. Do they sound like they know what is prophetic activism?

Weekly questions for 50-minute group discussions (Miriam)

1. What questions do you have about the teaching presentation?
2. What stood out to you about today's character?
3. Can you share a story of struggle that came up for you during the presentation?
4. How can you utilize what you have learned today in your own life?
5. In your opinion, what made the character a prophetic activist?

Journal prompt for today

How did it feel learning about Rizpah today? Explain in detail. Please add anything you would like the researcher to know.

Closing thanks and prayers

Agenda for June 20, 2022
 Rev. Kymberley Clemons-Jones
 Doctoral Project
 United Theological Seminary

1. Welcome and Prayer
2. Teach about Ida B. Wells-Barnett
3. 50-minute group discussion
4. Explain journaling and give prompt question

50 -Minute discussions

(Things to observe)

1. Facial expressions when discussing topics
2. Positive and negative expressions of being in a black and female-only group.
3. Was sharing stories of struggle easy or difficult for participants? Use names but then assign their numbers.
4. Do they sound like they have a desire to be involved in the community?
5. Do they sound like they know what is prophetic activism?

Weekly questions for 50-minute group discussions (Miriam)

1. What questions do you have about the teaching presentation?
2. What stood out to you about today's character?
3. Can you share a story of struggle that came up for you during the presentation?
4. How can you utilize what you have learned today in your own life?
5. In your opinion, what made the character a prophetic activist?

Journal prompt for today

What made this historical woman special, in your opinion?

Closing thanks and prayers

Agenda for June 27, 2022
 Rev. Kymberley Clemons-Jones
 Doctoral Project
 United Theological Seminary

1. Welcome and Prayer
2. Teach about Woman with the Issue of Blood
3. 50-minute group discussion
4. Explain journaling and give prompt question

50 -Minute discussions

(Things to observe)

1. Facial expressions when discussing topics
2. Positive and negative expressions of being in a black and female-only group.
3. Was sharing stories of struggle easy or difficult for participants? Use names but then assign their numbers.
4. Do they sound like they have a desire to be involved in the community?
5. Do they sound like they know what is prophetic activism?

Weekly questions for 50-minute group discussions (Miriam)

1. What questions do you have about the teaching presentation?
2. What stood out to you about today's character?
3. Can you share a story of struggle that came up for you during the presentation?
4. How can you utilize what you have learned today in your own life?
5. In your opinion, what made the character a prophetic activist?

Journal prompt for today

How did it feel to share your journey with other Black women this week?

Closing thanks and prayers

Agenda for July 5, 2022
 Rev. Kymberley Clemons-Jones
 Doctoral Project
 United Theological Seminary

1. Welcome and Prayer
2. Teach about Mamie Till Mobley
3. 50-minute group discussion

50 -Minute discussions
 (Things to observe)

1. Facial expressions when discussing topics
2. Positive and negative expressions of being in a black and female-only group.
3. Was sharing stories of struggle easy or difficult for participants? Use names but then assign their numbers.
4. Do they sound like they have a desire to be involved in the community?
5. Do they sound like they know what is prophetic activism?

Weekly questions for 50-minute group discussions (Miriam)

1. What questions do you have about the teaching presentation?
2. What stood out to you about today's character?
3. Can you share a story of struggle that came up for you during the presentation?
4. How can you utilize what you have learned today in your own life?
5. In your opinion, what made the character a prophetic activist?

Journal prompt for today

What similarities do you see between yourself and the historical or Biblical women discussed?

Closing thanks and prayers

Agenda for July 11, 2022
 Rev. Kymberley Clemons-Jones
 Doctoral Project
 United Theological Seminary

1. Welcome and Prayer
2. Teach about Womanism
3. 50-minute group discussion

50 -Minute discussions
Things to look for and to draw out from participants

1. Facial expressions when discussing topics
2. Positive and negative expressions of being in a black and female-only group.
3. Was sharing stories of struggle easy or difficult for participants? Use names but then assign their numbers.
4. Do they sound like they have a desire to be involved in the community?
5. Do they sound like they know what is prophetic activism?

Questions for 50-minute group discussions

1. What stood out to you about today's lesson?
2. Can you relate to Radical Subjectivity in Womanist theology?
3. Can you relate to Traditional Communalism in Womanist theology?
4. Can you relate to Redemptive Self-love in Womanist theology?
6. Can you relate to Critical Engagement in Womanist theology?
7. How can you utilize what you have learned today in your own life?

Journal Prompt

How can you apply what you have learned from these Historical/Biblical women in the past five weeks?

Closing thanks and prayers

Agenda for July 18, 2022
Rev. Kymberley Clemons-Jones
Doctoral Project
United Theological Seminary

1. Welcome and Prayer
2. 30-minute group discussion
3. Participant introductions

Weekly questions for 60-minute group discussions (Olivette)

1. What was your favorite lesson and why?
2. Who was your favorite Biblical and/or Historical character and why?
3. How can you use the themes from womanist theology day-to-day?
4. How did it feel to share your personal stories in this group?
5. How can you utilize what you have learned in this study?
6. Would you participate in another Black women's group again?
 - a. Was sharing easy or difficult?
7. Have you been inspired these last six weeks, and how?

Thanks to context associates, participants, and Closing Prayer

APPENDIX C

PRE- AND POST-TEST QUESTIONNAIRE

**Doctoral Project
United Theological Seminary
Rev. Kymberley Clemons-Jones
June 13 – July 18**

Pre- and Post-Questionnaire

1. How would you define the term Prophetic Activism?
2. What persons in your life, past or present, might have been prophetic activists and why?
3. Have you ever participated in a support group for Black female “only” participants? If yes, what was the main goal of the group?
4. How has hearing stories of Black women in history helped you to make changes in your own life?
5. How has sharing your own story of struggle and faith with others helped you to make changes in your own life?
6. What are some events in your life, traumatic or otherwise, that changed your life for the good or bad?
7. What problems in your community could you see yourself addressing in the Valley Stream community or surrounding areas?
8. What programs or services do you think are lacking in your community?

APPENDIX D

JOURNAL QUESTIONS AND PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSES

Journal Questions and Participants' Response

In the first five weeks of this study, journal questions were given at the end of each class. Some were done electronically, and others were hand-written. Each week the participants were given a different question to inform this study. Responses were not edited in any way.

Electronic Journal – P1

PARTICIPANT 1

Journal question #1

How did it feel learning about Rizpah today?

Learning about Rizpah was very inspirational. Her testimony represents, the pain, love, power, and strength of a mother and how we will be there fighting for our children even after death. She was a faithful mother of murdered sons. Like all mothers we do our best to keep our children safe. We try to protect them the best we can but we are only able to do but so much. Most times we are not able to protect our kids from certain situations. But as a mother we will fight with the most dangerous creatures that try to bring harm to our kids. Even in death we will protect our children and their legacy. I feel there is a lot of Rizpah in me when it comes to the love and the extent that I will go to make sure my kids area safe.

Journal question #2

What made this historical/biblical woman special, in your opinion? Explain.

What made Ida B. Wells special was her using her platform and courageously reported on the horrific violence against African Americans during the period of lynching. I feel her publicizing the horrific act of lynching started a movement and gave African Americans a backbone to stand up and fight back. She did so by bringing light to this to pushed politicians to change laws to make lynching a crime.

Listening to the story and learning about Ida B. Wells brought up feelings in me because I feel that in today's world, African Americans are still going through a form of lynching rather it is with the police killing us in our own homes or white racist men killing us as we go for a jog in our own neighborhoods. It makes me scared and borderline paranoid about my sons, brothers, and partner walking around on this earth. Even though lynching is against the law, I still feel if we are caught up in the wrong part of a town, we can still be taking to the woods and hung.

Having this conversation tonight was needed for me. It allowed me to get my emotions and feelings out on how scared I really am being an African American woman, mother, sister, and daughter to African American men.

Journal question #3

How did it feel to share your journey with other Black Women this week? Explain.

Today I shared my experience about my son who was around 12 at the time and had a racist encounter with the police. I really don't share that story often because when I hear it out loud, it makes it too real and me very angry. When having the opportunity to open to other black mothers, it felt so comforting to know that I am not alone, and all my feelings and fear are valid. It's not easy being a mother of a black child. It is constant worrying, nervousness, feeling your heart leave your chest and drop down to the bottom of your stomach every time they leave the house knowing that they don't even have the police to protect and look after them. To have that type of fear living in you everyday, and having a group to come and share your feelings, which brings a type of freeing feeling. Just to be able to get it out and to take in the advice of other women who may have gotten their child to a certain age in life and to have them share their wisdom makes me feel I can face another day.

Journal Question #4

What similarities do you see between yourself and the historical/biblical women? Explain.

I stand on the shoulder of strong black women that have stood up and fought against for what's right and protect people of color, the ones we love, and our community. I don't have similar stories between myself and the biblical/historical women that we have spoken about in the past weeks, but I have similar passion and love to protect my loved one and fight for the rights of my people in the community we all must share and live in. Learning about these women makes me want to get involved more and see how I can insert myself in the fight to make this country a better place to live for my children and grandchildren.

Journal Question #5

How can you apply what you have learned from these historical/biblical women in the past five weeks?

I don't work with any social justice groups, but I would love to find one and see where I can insert myself to help with the cause. Learning about these amazing women gave me the push and the passion to be an advocate for what I am involved with now. I have found my way of trying to save the world and that is through organ donation. It's a fight that is near and dear to my heart and one that I was not put in by choice but by situations in my life.

Week 1

When I first learned about Rizpah I really could not identify with her because she was a concubine, but the more I read about her the more I understood her pain. Her two sons were killed unjustly and she could not protect them because she had no power. This remind me of George Floyd who was being choke to death by police and nothing anyone did could stop the police officer from killing him. All Rizpah could do now is protect her two sons' bodies in death. She protected her children bodies from being devoured by the prey. Just like many black women that children get killed unjustly they must advocate for justice.

Week 2

Ida B. Wells was special to me because she was an anti-lynching activist. She exposed the horrific and violence against blacks. She was first to write a book called the Red Code about lynching and expose the nasty white lies, how whites were killing Black people by lynching them. She also started the first black kindergarten to give our black children the same education as their peers.

Week 3

How did it feel to share your journey with other black woman this week?

It felt exuberating being able to share my feelings without being judged as an angry black woman. I felt that this group was more sensitive due to the fact our experiences with society and the propaganda that are use against black females to sexualize and discredit our accomplishments is felt in the black communities. As women we must exhibit strength in all we do.

WEEK 4

The similarities I see in me is with Mother Clara Hale. She was a Humanitarian and foster and cared for many children. I have similarities with her because I have a great love for children, and as a young girl I took care of my siblings. Just like mother Hale I fostered numerous children so their mothers could get their lives together. My house was called a group home because I had so many children in my home. I also install a camera in the Basement where the children hung out. Lucky that I did because one day a mother came to my house with a police officer saying her daughter got drunk in my house and wanted to press charges. I proceeded to showed the police office and the mother my security footage not only do I have cameras in the areas the children go, all my entrance has cameras as well. After viewing the camera footage, it was clear this girl never was in my house and she eventually admitted she lied. This could have gone badly for me but I was always told to cover my butt, it's so funny everyone knows there is cameras but they tend to forget.

WEEK 5

I can apply what I learned by keeping the conversation going and helping others to understand the propaganda that is corrupting our community. I can advocate for the less fortunate against social injustice. We must as blacks collectively start making our children, family, and friends aware of what's going on in our communities and how we can as a group help one another.

I remember when I first moved into my community, my husband was coming home from work and had his key in the lock when the police shined their search light on him. They ask him "what are you doing at that door", my husband politely explained that this is his home, the police ask for id while hands on their gun. When my husband handed them his id and they looked at it, they had the audacity to ask him where does he work. If my husband didn't have a cool head this could have gone very badly. Some whites feels that a black family shouldn't be able to afford to live in their communities. This is an example of why we must teach our young black men to keep a cool head and deal with the situation when they are safely out of harms way.

Written Journal - P5

#5

Week one - How did it feel learning about the historical/biblical woman this week?

This was the first time for me learning about Rizpah. Her story of grief was emotional and inspirational.

Emotional for all that Rizpah had to endure. Rizpah was not respected and looked down upon. She had little or no say for what went on in her life. Her feeling of being powerless to prevent the brutal murder of her two sons. Her sons' corpse left exposed to wild animals and the weather conditions. Rizpah is left all alone to mourn the loss of her sons.

Inspirational - Rizpah was a devoted mother who loved her sons. Her love for her sons were so strong she honored and protected their corpse from the buzzards day and night for about six months, never abandoned their sides. Rizpah was totally devoted to her sons, never gave up her fight for an honorable burial for her sons. Rizpah not only protected her sons' corpse, she also protected King Saul's five grandsons that were brutally murdered too.

Rizpah exhibited strong faith, courage, undying love

great will power, strength and dedication. She was surrounded by pain and grief but was courageous and bold. Her faith and devotion kept her going day and night for about six months. When news of Rizpah's demonstration reached King David, he granted her two sons their honorable burial. God then ended the three year famine.

Week Two- What made this historical/biblical woman special in your opinion?

Ida B. Wells was special for her bravery, courage, dedication, and activism. She spent most of her life dedicated to many different movements. Through her dedication she fought tirelessly for all her beliefs and was resilient.

Being a civil rights advocate, an investigative journalist, an educator and feminist, Ida educated the public through her newspaper, and periodicals about the racial injustice of African Americans. She was involved in the suffrage movement, anti-lynching and civil rights movement.

She was a crusader for justice. Even though she faced potential danger and challenges she kept fighting for social equality for African Americans. She took her anti-lynching overseas.

Week Three - How did it feel to share your journey with other Black Women this week?

I only learned about Emmet Till several years ago. It was also surprising to me while listening to some of the participants who also only learned about Emmet Till in recent years. Most indicated that the story of Emmet Till's death was never taught to them in school.

The journey shared this week was heart-wrenching because the lynching of African Americans is still in existence in 2022. The noose was traded in for guns. Just as our ancestors endured pain and infliction, there is little or no justice for African Americans today.

We are angry and outrage time after time by the innocent loss of African American lives. Too often the incidents are the same, caused by the ones sworn to serve and protect us. When we think we have made one step forward they pull us back two steps. They will never experience our indignation and pain inflicted on us. The laws are made to work against us.

I saw a video clip where a mother shared the following information: She told her son

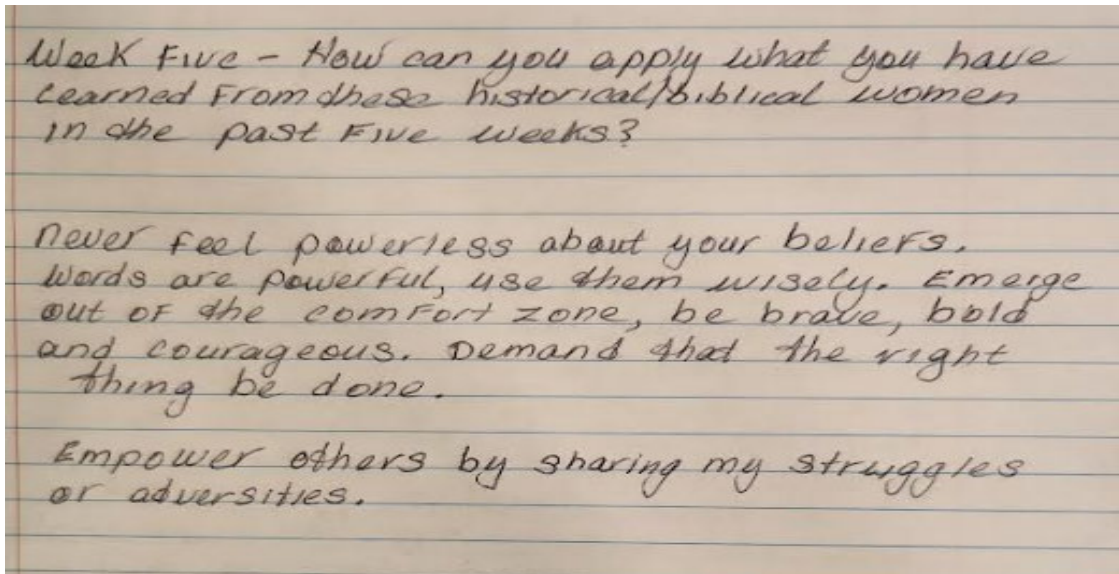
do not touch anything that you are not going to purchase and most importantly get a receipt for anything that you purchase, gum, bag of chips

Week Four - What similarities do you see between yourself and the historical/biblical women?

In 2010 I was diagnosed with breast cancer. The news at first was devastating. I remembered walking from the doctor's office to the train station tear-eyed. I quickly talked to myself I am not going to cry, everything will be alright. I had faith that I was going to come out of this victorious.

At first I only shared the news with a few close family members and close friends. I did not want to feel the sense of pity from anyone. It was important for me to feed off healthy and positive energies.

I had a partial mastectomy; I did one year of chemo treatment (every two weeks), radiation (five days weekly) for eight weeks and an oral daily pill for 10 years. I demonstrated great strength through it all and kept up with my everyday life. I thank God for his healing blessings and favors, left, right and center.



Electronic Journal – P6

Week 1 – June 13, 2022

How did it feel learning about Rizpah today? Explain in detail. Please add anything you would like the researcher to know.

I felt inspired. To hear and reflect on Rizpah actions, consistently doing what she did for months, showed me a persistence and passion that I believe we should have when fighting for what we believe is right.

This prophetic act of Rizpah also showed me that my one step toward a cause can have a lasting and broad impact. What we do is not only about us, and God will move on our behalf, like I believe God did on David whether or not his motives were good for her change of mind.

Week 2 – June 20, 2022

What made this historical woman special in your opinion? Explain in detail. How can it prompt us to social activism? Please add anything you would like the researcher to know.

Her boldness in going against the grain, to stand up for her rights. Then, Ida, known as an outspoken journalist, used her gift of writing as a voice to speak out against what happened with her friends. This can prompt us to use our gifts today to impact change.

This is why we're given gifts, to use to be a blessing to others and prayerfully, to generations.

Week 3 – June 27, 2022

How did it feel to share your journey with other Black Women this week? Explain in detail. Please add anything you would like the researcher to know.

I did not share my journey, so I'm unable to answer this question. However, witnessing the ladies share their stories with the other black women was very encouraging. It showed the strength of the black women as I know us. A people who are very nurturing and supportive, but also willing to challenge other women to be better. We respectfully listened as women shared and we did so with patience, compassion, and empathy. Examples of being Christ-like. We also showed each other that, like Mamie Till, Ida, and Rizpah, we turn our trauma into triumph.

Week 4 – July 5, 2022

What similarities do you see between yourself and any of the historical/biblical women? Explain. Please add anything you would like the researcher to know.

For one, I can imagine the frustration and weariness that the woman with the issue of blood must have gone through struggling with an illness for years with no remedy. I, myself, have gone through health challenges of which doctors could not remedy, and like the woman with the issue of blood, I have to go to the Great Physician to exercise my faith in order to receive healing. I can also see the similarity of being blessed with a community of women who support and encourage. I have been blessed with many women in my life, whether blood family or women friends who I consider Aunties or sisters (fictitious kin ☺) who have been a support and encouragement to me.

It's interesting that in the many times that I have read about the woman with the issue of blood, that I never thought about how she knew that Jesus was coming and how she knew that He had power to heal. It was heart warning to hear the revelation that it must have been or rather had to be the women she was surrounded by who would share this good news with her because she was separated from all men, except for the physicians she went to. I am a believer that having a community of women is vital for a women's mental, physical, and spiritual health. We are better together!

Week 5 – July 11, 2022

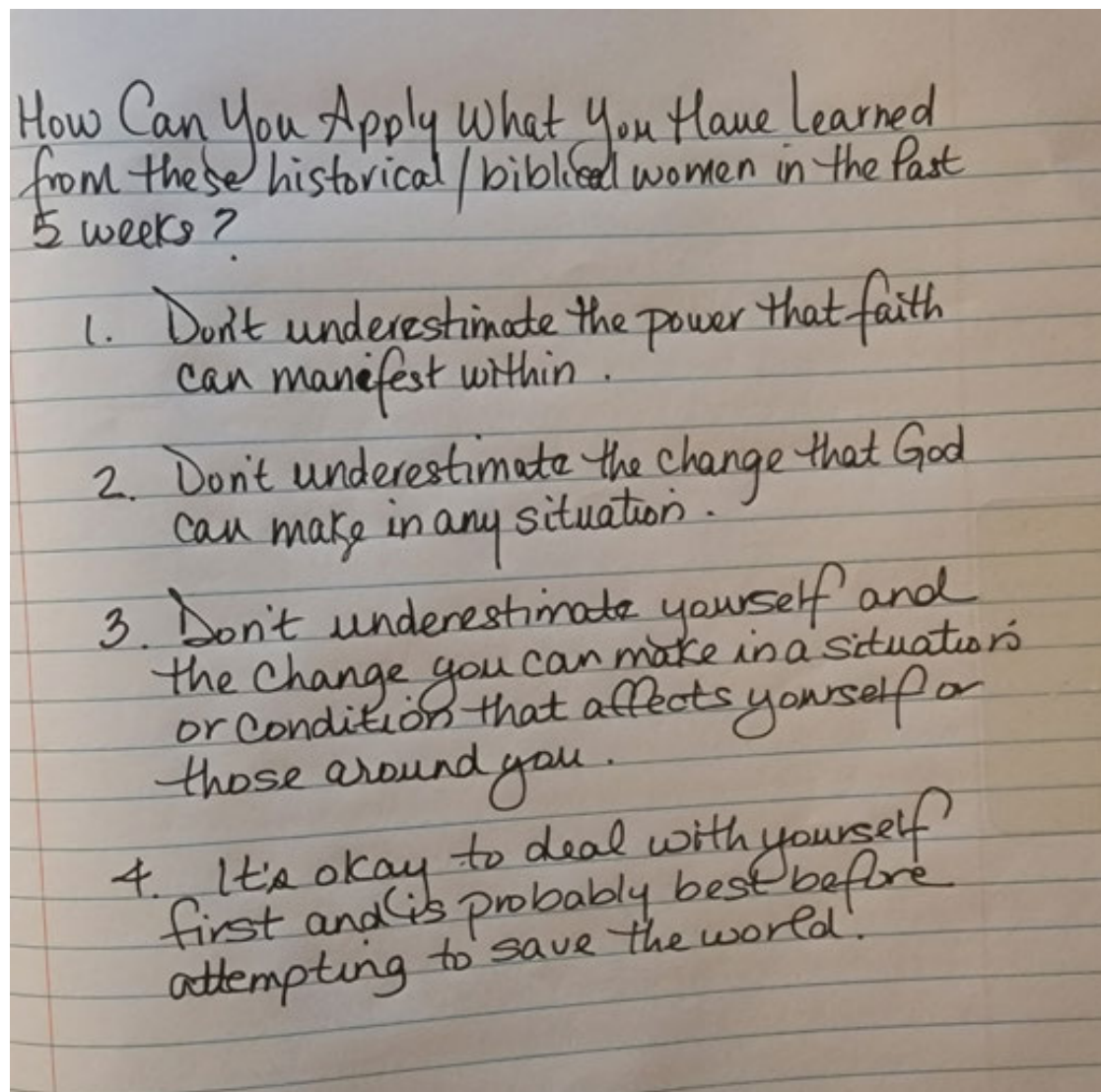
How can you apply what you have learned from these historical/biblical women and womanist theology in the past five weeks? Home, community, church, local neighborhood, etc?

In all that I have learned and heard in these sessions which were very enlightening and encouraging, I can apply a greater appreciation for sisterhood. I can apply walking in

holy boldness to step out and use the gifts God gave me to bring forth positive change and make a life transforming impact in my community and in the church. I can also apply the mindset that my life's challenges are steppingstones to fulfill a calling on my life. It's about perspective so that I don't let the storms of life make me sick or kill me.

I can also apply selflessness in remembering that what I go through in life is not just about me but a propelling into prophetic activism. There's a quote I have written in my e-mails as a tagline and what I like to say when I'm doing a Live broadcast, "I bring a message of healing to the people of God that we may prosper and change a nation." I have learned from this prophetic activism doctoral project that prophetic activism changes a nation.

Electronic Journal P7



Journal Prompt 6/20/22

1. What made Ida B. Wells special in your opinion?
2. Why?

It made me proud to be a Black woman. I'm convinced that I was made Black because I can handle the pressure that comes with my hue. There is no way a fragile little white woman could ever handle all that comes with living in this beautiful complexion.

Because I am forced to live in this skin, I like Ms. Wells had to learn to navigate so many systems and just by virtue of my being, I am making change. She was everything white folks didn't expect. I'd like to continue to be what white people don't expect.

On the other hand, women who are phenomenal like this, make me feel like a slouch! Change makers like Ms. Wells require more than just willpower, they clearly have the undergirding of God in order to accomplish all that they do. People are called for such a time as this and that's what made her special.

What Similarities Do You See Between Yourself and Any of the Historical Biblical / Secular Women?

I had already expressed this in the group, but due to my encounters with the medical profession and misdiagnosis of nearly 30 years, I can relate to seeing doctors in nearly every major northeastern city looking for an answer.

Just like those who turned away from our "blood sister" I've been turned away one time for a medical procedure. As I entered the operating room, the physician said, "You! Again!? Get out of here! I've told your doctor the procedure can't be done on you!" Once again my hopes for a cure dashed. He didn't want to touch me.

So I can relate to being desperate to find a cure, no one caring to help. When all you have for hope is your faith.

Journal Prompt 6/13/2022

1. How did it feel learning about Rispa today
2. What would you like the researcher to know today?

Learning about Rispa made me sad for her. While her strength and dedication to motherhood cannot be denied, I can't help but notice that she seemed to be totally alone in her suffering.

I was disappointed tonight that within this group of highly evolved and intelligent women that no one mentioned that Rispa had no "sisters" to support her. There was no mention about any other women showing up for her as she stayed by the corpses of her sons.

It became more evident to me that we have a long way to go in supporting one another. It felt to me that because we were convinced that David was after God's heart, all else was unnecessary to acknowledge. So much so that just like in church, women abandon one another and stick by the man of God even in his wrong doings. It was disappointing.

Even when I mentioned my suffering at the hands of a "David," only one woman acknowledged that pain with words of encouragement. All the rest went silent. Are they saying my father was right?

Hmmm.

Journal Prompt - Mamie Till-Mobley

How did it feel to share your personal stories with the group this week?

It is easy with like-minded women of color. I wonder if it would be so easy with the descendants of Colonizers in the room.

It's always a blessing and often also a curse to have so many others who resonate with your experiences. However, sharing personal stories with other sisters was easier than I anticipated. It's difficult when I come into a space assuming I will be judged by my peers or not taken seriously.

It's a real leap of faith to trust others but it's more important to trust myself with knowing that treading into unknown waters is also a way to grow and expand as a woman.

Electronic Journal P8

Week One – How did it feel learning about the historical/biblical woman this week?
I was aware of Rizpah. It was interesting to hear others' opinions of her and the way she was perceived.

Week Two – What made this historical/biblical woman special, in your opinion? I was not aware of her dying on my birthday. Honesty, that was special to me. However, this does not take away the unique and challenging things she did for women.

Week Three – How did it feel to share your journey with other Black Women this week? I have no problem sharing my journey with anyone. However, I left the class, so I did not share.

Week Four – What similarities do you see between yourself and the historical/biblical women? As a woman in today's current times, I am because each of these women we discussed in the class stood and fought in the gap for me to exist. Each woman paved away for me to be strong, educated, and fearless, hopeful, and trust God in the seen and unseen.

Week Five – How can you apply what you have learned from these historical/biblical women in the past five weeks? Be true to yourself

Electronic Journal P9

Week One – How did it feel learning about the historical/biblical woman this week? Explain.

Learning about Rizpah was very encouraging as I could relate to her love at all costs for her own sons as well as her service to the other sons that were killed as well. We learned that the sacrifices mothers make for their children go as far back as the beginning of time. Hearing the insights, opinions, and experiences of the other women in the class was very insightful and helped me to know what all of us as women value as important, consider groundbreaking and in some cases, explained why there is a need to participate in such classes.

Week Two – What made this historical/biblical woman special in your opinion? Explain.

Ida B. Wells was a pioneer, a leader, and is an integral part of our legacy as a people. Learning about her accomplishments and achievements made me proud to be a black woman as well as inspired me to be better, grow stronger in my confidence as a woman, and strive to do all I can to better my fellow man and woman. She paved the way for generations of black politicians, activists, and community leaders and it's her shoulders that we all stand on. She is an American Shero and icon.

Week Three – How did it feel to share your journey with other Black Women this week? Explain.

It was liberating to not only share my experiences with other black women, but it was an honor and a privilege to hear theirs. The transparency in this group was amazing,

enriching, and inspiring. Some experiences moved me to pray, some to rejoice, and some to even weep. Some experiences moved me to self-reflection. I saw myself in some of the ladies, was inspired by many, and prayed for all. This was a great group of women from all ages, levels of education, and walks of life. I believe that is what made the classes so rich.

Week Four – What similarities do you see between yourself and the historical/biblical women? Explain.

As the mother of a son, I saw myself in Mamie Till as one who will do what is necessary to protect him from the hatred of this world. I'm grateful that my son is alive and well and continue to pour into him what I feel is needed to help him grow to be the best human being he can be while embracing the legacy and load that being a Black Man in America must bear. I see her strength and reflect on my own. I see her resolve and see my own. I see her determination to get the message out to all that will listen and see me.

Week Five – How can you apply what you have learned from these historical/biblical women in the past five weeks?

The woman at the well was determined to get her blessing "by any means necessary." She knew her blessing was in Jesus' hands and pressed her way, by herself, to her breakthrough. Her pressing made her whole. That's what the Lord will do for you. When you seek HIM out — HE meets all your needs. I've learned over the years that it's personal — your relationship with God that is. The more you put into it — the more you get out of it — but you have to walk in faith — even if that means you have to walk all by yourself.

I've learned that Black Women are the most powerful beings on the planet — pair that with the love of God and we are forces to be reckoned with. There is nothing we cannot do when we are determined to do it. I've learned that you must believe in yourself — even when no one else does. I've learned to trust God in all things. I've learned that age does not equate to maturity nor common sense. I've learned that everyone's journey through this thing we call life is different and we should never assume what people know or don't know. I've learned that though we have come a long way, we still have a long way to go. I've learned that all things work together for the good of them who love The Lord and are called according to HIS purpose. I've learned that our pain has a purpose and that is to help us grow and help someone else get through. Finally, I've learned that it's our responsibility to leave our mark on the world and to pull our sisters up along the way.

Written Journal - P11

June 13
 H.W Journal Prompt #1
 How did you feel learning about Rizpah today?
 Add anything you want the researcher to know.

Learning about Rizpah and who she was was new to me. I had a feeling of curiosity once learning who she was and what she did. I learned that she was a woman of strength, advocacy, resiliency and a woman of trauma. She was also a protector.

As we learned about and discussed Rizpah today what came to mind was that she represented so many women today including myself. As a mother also I will do above and beyond to protect my children.

I wondered what the other mothers of the other boys felt watching and knowing how Rizpah stood in the gap protecting the bodies of their sons. Did they share

their gratitude to Rizpah?

Resiliency, strength, advocacy, activism runs deep through our heritage as a woman.

Journal Prompt #2 (Wk. 2)

What made this historical woman special in your opinion?

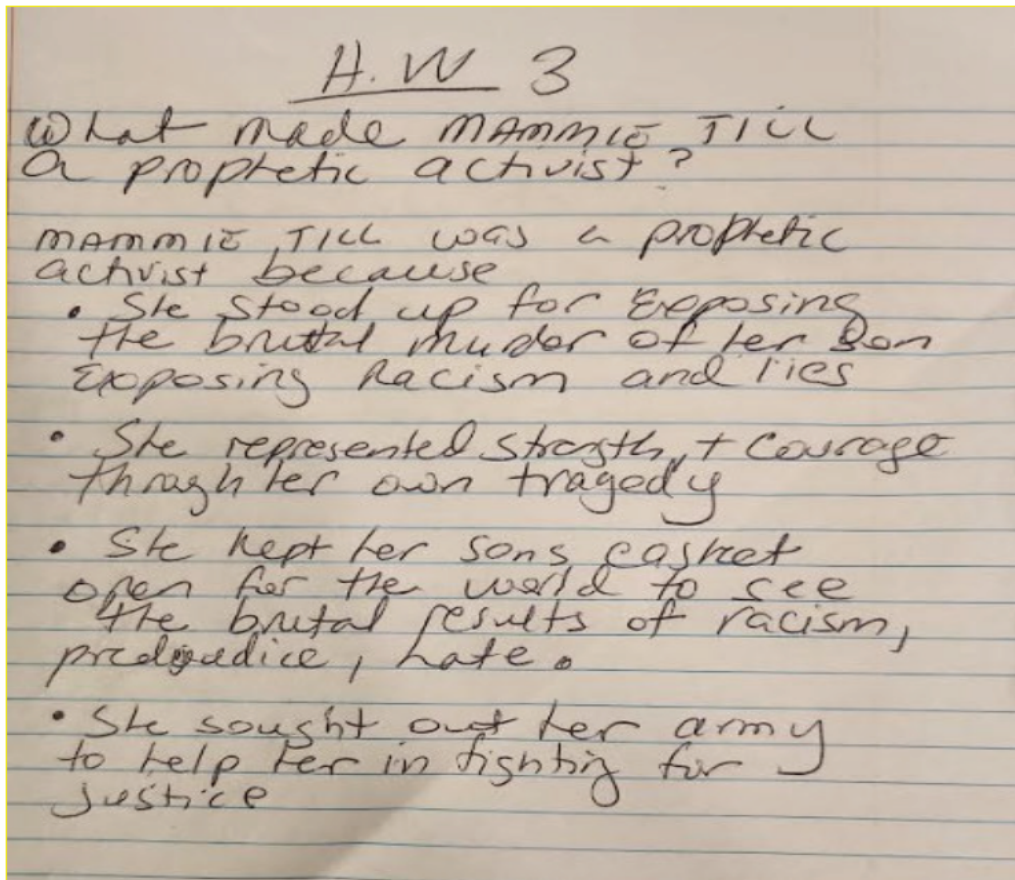
How can she prompt you to prophetic activism?

- IDA B. Wells was special because she was a feminist, leading prominent and skilled anti-lynching crusader. She stood on principle and did not waver. She tactfully used her skill in research and investigating and put pen to paper when it came to injustice.

Journal Prompt #4

What similarities do you see between the historical or biblical women and yourself and explain.

- The similarities I see between the historical and biblical women and myself are
- Resiliency
 - Advocacy
 - Family Focused
 - Don't mess with my children - LOL But for real 😊
 - Faith



Electronic Journal P12

Prophetic Activism Journal

1. How did it feel learning about Rizpah today? Explain in detail. Please add anything you would like the researcher to know.

It felt very upsetting learning about Rizpah. To know that her sons were taken from her in such a permanent and violent way was heartbreaking. It reminded me a lot of how Black young men in this current age are taken from their families and loved ones so tragically and suddenly. It brought up a lot of feelings that I have had when I see a headline of another Black boy or man being killed by police for no reason. To know that Rizpah had the strength to create a tribute to the loss of her sons so that everyone knew what happened, and to camp out there every day was honestly shocking to me. I can't imagine being able to muster up the strength to do that if I had been in a similar situation. I already know how strong and how much fortitude mothers have but learning this story was another reminder. Although it was upsetting, it was also uplifting to know that she didn't let that break her. That is exactly what made her

2. What made this historical woman special in your opinion? Explain in detail. Please add anything you would like the researcher to know.

Ida B Wells was extremely special because she didn't let anyone scare her out of accomplishing what she set out to do. She put herself in danger throughout her entire career by uncovering stories of lynchings and discussing things in the public eye that would make people uncomfortable. I'm sure that she had some fear in doing so knowing that she was risking the safety of herself and her family, but she did not let that stop her from doing what she was obviously put on this earth to do. I think that it makes her the most special. Fear is inevitable but working through that fear is bravery and she was a brave activist that fought for the rights of Black men and women across the nation; even when she left the South for New York.

3. How did it feel to share your journey with other Black women this week? Explain in detail. Please add anything you would like the researcher to know.

It felt comforting to share my journey with other Black women this week. I discussed my lack of optimism when it came to things changing in her nation in regard to police brutality and how similar things still are when Mamie Till was fighting for justice for her son Emmet Till. I can sometimes be a little cynical about these things and the state of the world and the other women served as reminders that we can't become numb or cynical to these horrible things that happen. They also reminded me that we have to look at how far we have come since situations like Emmet Till happen. Yes, there are still police and white people out there who hate our kind but we have plenty of ally's and people fighting for us too.

4. What similarities do you see between yourself and any of the historical/biblical women? Explain. Please add anything you would like the researcher to know.

The main similarities that I see between myself and all of the historical women is their bravery and drive to fight for the underdog. One of my main strengths is my bravery and courage, and the fact that I don't shrink from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain. I speak up for what's right even if there's opposition and act on my convictions even if they're unpopular. All of these historical women have this same exact trait.

5. How can you apply what you have learned from these historical/biblical women in the past five weeks?

I can make sure that I always speak up for what's right and give back to my community through volunteer efforts with organizations that help further my people and are for missions that I support. I can also keep faith over fear and never let fear stop me from doing something that I believe in.

Journal Prompt Q & A**How did it feel learning about Rizpah today?**

I hadn't really known much about Rizpah in depth until tonight's meeting. Reading the bible, I often come across these characters but don't always take the time to get to know who they were or their backstory. What I learned about Rizpah was that she didn't allow who she was deemed to be, her unfortunate circumstances, or the terrible fate that her family suffered, to stifle her strong will and love for her children. Rizpah made me think about Rahab, and that's because a good friend of mine wrote a modernized book series based on her biblical character called *I Am Rahab*. Both Rizpah and Rahab seem very similar to me because they were both strong, committed, humble women who prophetically activated their faith for the sake of their families, and courageously spoke truth to the powers that be, regardless of what the culture told them was 'law' at the time. Rizpah is considered the grace of surrender, and her actions and determination produced significant change, and the latter produced an unmatched legacy. (Side note: Throughout the meeting I wanted to mention that I am also a second wife and in the early years of my marriage I experienced some very challenging, and at times, traumatic moments with my husband and his family. And, although we are on the mend – by God's awesome grace – I felt uncomfortable opening up to the group because he was walking about).

What made this historical woman special, in your opinion? Explain in detail. Please add anything you would like the researcher to know.

What made Ida B. Wells-Barnett special was the fact that she didn't allow the racist evils of her era, propelled mostly by white men, to dictate her purposeful path. God undoubtedly had a plan for her, and she carried it through fearlessly with tenacity, affectivity, and faith. She used her God-given gift to inspire solid change that is still prevalent today. She turned her pain, grief, and rage, caused by the lynchings of dear friends, into words of power that would become a network of restoration and renewal for Black people for generations to come. Her perseverance inspires me to stand boldly while speaking my truth in the face of injustice.

How did it feel to share your journey with other Black Women this week? Explain

This experience has made me feel less vulnerable and more open to receiving and giving, even when I've felt as though my story would be perceived as less than valuable. I was raised in a time that screamed "you are to be seen and not heard." My mother (who never healed from her own traumas) was very strict and didn't welcome any opinion that came from a child; so, I learned to internalize and suppress my emotions. My friends saw me as the goofy chic because I was always smiling and laughing because I hid my pain so perfectly. So, I've enjoyed being in the presence of such wise women: both young and older, who have revealed similar experiences in a genuine and unapologetically loving way.

What similarities do you see between yourself and any of the historical/biblical women? Explain. Please add anything you would like the researcher to know.

Rizpah was an example of powerlessness, doused with the grace of surrender. Her persistence, guard over her sons, and prayers represent resistance and that restoration is a possible outcome. So, despite the tragedies that transpired, she was triumphant in the end. Ida B. Wells battled sexism, racism, and violence; however, she didn't allow those isms to keep her down. She used her gift as a writer and skilled journalist to shed light on the severely harsh circumstances that African Americans faced throughout the South to empower not just her race, but her gender. Mamie Till Mobley was forced into American history because her precious son was murdered, which propelled her into a lifetime of advocacy, starting with seeking justice for the death of her son. The woman with the issue of blood had heard about Jesus, so she pursued him faithfully, reached out to him with intention and was freed from her suffering. She was made whole. In all of these women, I see similarities in faith, strength, determination, and advocacy. As a mother, when I step up to champion my children when and if they ever feel treated unfairly by a teacher, a so-called friend, or anyone; and as a wife, when I need to communicate my concerns, I can become a bold, courageous, and protective mother/wife, willing to go above and beyond to ensure that my children and my marriage are in a safe space, working together and being treated with fairness and equality.

How can you apply what you have learned from these historical/biblical women and womanist theology in the past five weeks?

Home, community, church, local neighborhood, etc? I can apply what I've learned from these historical and biblical women in every aspect of my life as a wife, mother, relative, friend, peer, and colleague. The strength that these women encompassed in order to move boldly with faith and courage allows me to continue to move forward fearlessly with confidence, and with the knowledge that – it has all been done and there is nothing new under the sun – and God is in the midst of it all testing the genuineness of our faith so that it may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Electronic Journal P15

PARTICIPANT 15

Doctoral Study Journal Prompts

Week One – How did it feel learning about the historical/biblical woman this week? Explain.

This week's discussion about Rizpah was really eye-opening for me because in all the times I've heard her story, I've never heard it in the way it was presented and discussed. Prior to this meeting, I suppose I looked at her as a strong woman who was trying to "do right" by her children who were killed, which any mother or mother figure can relate to.

After learning more about her, I realized she was a warrior who put herself at risk of harm from the natural elements, passersby, and who knows what else to ensure her childrens' dignity was honored. Being in a vulnerable position as a single woman with no male "protection" and still persisting, she was a demonstration of walking the talk, despite her own personal discomfort. I did a bit of reading afterwards and found out that according to some research, she was out there guarding her sons for five months. The dedication to stick to her guns in that way for so long must have been agonizing, but ultimately it was worth it because her actions led to her sons being properly buried as their tradition required. It reinforced for me that standing up and doing the right thing doesn't require us to be perfect or to have it all figured out; we just need to be willing and ready to see it through. I really hope that more of our churches will highlight the women of the Bible more in Sunday sermons, Bible studies, etc because Christian women, young and old, need to know more about them in order to draw inspiration to change the world around them.

Week Two – What made this historical/biblical woman special, in your opinion? Explain.

What makes Ida B Wells-Barnett so special, in my opinion, is that she took action and spoke up on the issue of lynching when she very well could have been lynched herself for what she was doing. To publicly call out White people for what they were doing to Black people at a time took a great deal of fortitude to do, especially because she herself was born a slave and likely knew first-hand the brutality she was subjecting herself to by criticizing those in power. Coming from the background of being a slave and an orphan, the fact that she learned to read and write is revolutionary in and of itself. To use that privilege to highlight and inform about the injustice taking place around Black people was amazing. Her being a co-founder of the NAACP is also a testament to her commitment to walking in her purpose as an advocate and agitator for the betterment of her fellow Black Americans. Despite receiving threats, she never cowered or stopped what she was doing. Rather, she continued to press on despite the opposition, and she did it while still standing in the roles of wife and mother. A true superwoman!

Week Three – How did it feel to share your journey with other Black Women this week? Explain.*Did not attend this session*

Week Four – What similarities do you see between yourself and the historical/biblical women? Explain.

One of the similarities I see between myself and the woman with the issue of blood is our shared persistence. I have the same tenacity and "go-getter" attitude. My personal philosophy comes from the motto of Clark Atlanta University: "Find a way or make one." The woman saw the crowds and it did not overwhelm her or dissuade her from her goal. She knew that in order to get what she needed that she had to find a way to get to her help. Almost everything of significance I have achieved in my life has been the result of some kind of fight, so I know what it means to push past obstacles to meet your goals. She could have stayed in her "safe space" and continued to live with her condition, but

she knew there was a greater version of life out there for her, so she did the scary thing and took a leap of faith. She believed that by taking action she could manifest a change in her own circumstances. What also stood out to me was that she knew her why. She aligned what she desired with who/what could get her there, and the intentionality it took to do that was key to her success. I am working every day to do things with intentionality, and her story is a reminder to keep that in the forefront of my thoughts because true transformation cannot take place if there is no clarity on the goal and the actions needed to achieve it.

Week Five – How can you apply what you have learned from these historical/biblical women in the past five weeks?

I think I can take what I have learned back to my church women's group, as well as the general church membership and use it to hopefully unify my congregation around taking action in the community our church is in. We have a lot of ideas and dreams about what we would like to do, but we struggle with the why beyond "well the Bible says..." While what the Bible says is extremely important, we have to be mindful of what the actual community around us needs. Because that disconnect exists, we don't have the impact that we could. All of the women we discussed were intentional in what they did and while they didn't solve all the world's problems, they addressed at least one in the actions they took. What is clear is that one Black woman has the capability to make a monumental change with the right combination of faith, action, clarity of purpose, and the appropriate support to make things happen.

Electronic Journal P17

#17

Week 1- Rizpah - I had not heard of her until being a part of this weekly group session. I can't imagine being given to someone's husband as a second wife. I understand that was what was going on during that time. Although that was Rizpah's situation, she was submitted to serving as a second wife. She bore two sons who Leah claimed as her own and even until their death Rizpah was committed, caring, and determined for her sons to have a proper burial.

Week 2- Ida B. Wells-Barnette

I missed this week; however, I am aware of Ida B. Wells-Barnette's heartfelt concern about the lynchings of our ancestors during the late 1800's. In 1892, she wrote a book entitled *A Red Record*, which gave graphic descriptions of the horrendous acts of dehumanization against African Americans. Other published works include *Southern Horrors*, and *Crusade for Justice*, which was her autobiography. She was also the co-founder on the NAACP, and the first black suffrage group for women. Her life and accomplishments express her passion and advocacy for the dehumanization of our ancestors. The struggle continues as does the fight for equality and social justice to date. Ida

Week 3- Mamie Till Mobley

It was interesting to share my perspective and belief about this evening's story on Mamie Till and the horrific tragic death of her young son Emmett. It's always heart wrenching to hear as was my sisters on the line sharing their experience and mothering a black son. It saddened me to hear how afraid and in fear some of them are. I certainly understand. We really were able to feel each other's heart and I think this is important so that we all know how to support one another in prayer. Although this happened several decades ago, it is still going on today. I believe every woman that was online represents all Black women.

Week 4-Alice Walker

Alice Walker is an amazing writer and author of a plethora of books, including the *The Color Purple*, which was made into a movie and later a play for the Broadway Stage. Alice Walker was a social activist and feminist. I learned that when she was 8-years old, she was blinded in one eye and her mother gave her a typewriter. That is what sparked her writing career.

Summary

All of these remarkable women did remarkable things in their lives and they have become a part of history and a foundation for women of today to follow!

Electronic Journal P18

Participant 18 Rizpah

Journal Prompt assigned 05/13/2022:

How did it feel/emotion learning about Rizpah today? Explain in detail.

Learning about Rizpah was a source of encouragement for me to continue to press on during a time that I may have wanted to slow down or stop. She was qualified by man as a second-rate citizen (concubine of Saul/second wife), but God had greater plans for her if she would just remain obedient to His directions. Her faith in God and persistence changed a generation. In her mourning (laid down with sackcloth), she did not come of her post and mission to stand vigil over the seven who were chosen to pay for the sins of their forefather. Due to the sins of Saul, his descendants were predestined to be the atonement. Despite what happened to her two and the other five, she did not allow their bodies to be disgraced by vultures or wild animals feeding on their bodies. She stayed the course vigilantly until the famine was lifted (after 3 years) and rain came down. The rain was the beginning of the harvest. Rizpah demonstrated faith, persistent petitions, and trust in God to not shame her children and the others were killed. She served beyond her personal concerns. Her acts served a generation.

Ida B. Wells

Journal Prompt assigned 05/20/2022

What made this historical woman special in your opinion? Explain how this can prompt you to prophetic activism.

Ida B. Wells was persistent in her mission regardless of the obstacles that she faced. She used her skills to write about the injustices faced by people of color. Later, she started an anti-lynching crusade that brought much unwanted and negative attention. She did not back away in fear but moved courageously forward to battle the injustices of her day. Her activism allowed her to press on, which in most cases appear to be fearlessly. Knowing that lynching was an abdominal act, she passionately fought against it, regardless of the negative feedback and lack of support even within her community. She seemed to garner more strength despite the many hardships that she faced. Her story encourages me to press on regardless of the obstacles, because like giving birth, the pain comes before the birth. Battles are won only after the fight. "One had better die fighting against injustice than to die like a dog or a rat in a trap."

Mamie Till- Mobley

Journal Prompt assigned June 27, 2022

How did it feel to share your journey with other black women this week? Explain in detail.

It is an honor to share my journey. My journey, which is grounded in my faith in Jesus Christ, is my testimony that can help others draw to Christ. My scripture for this thought is Romans 10:14, New King James Version titled "Israel Rejects the Gospel."

¹⁴How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?

I believe that God chooses to reach people through people, although he can instantly change things.

The Woman with the Issue of Blood

Journal Prompt assigned 07/05/2022

What similarities do you see between you and any of the historical women? Explain.

The story of the Woman with the Issue of Blood is a reminder that despite current circumstances and the length of time of suffering, that our hope should remain in the hope which is built on Jesus' faithfulness. As written in the scripture, this woman suffered with the issue for 12 years and was ostracized by man because of her issue. The inner strength that allowed her to push through the crowd, I believe, was the presence of the Holy Spirit, that allowed her to believe in her healing simply by touching the hem of Jesus' garment.

I have heard that because of a variety of reasons, I would not be able to do the very things that I achieved. It is difficult to press against the crowd of naysayers, but my belief in the promises of God has empowered me to do what I sometimes questioned whether I should move forward.

All the women presented during this project were victorious as they championed for causes greater than themselves. They believed in the justice of God and not in man. They

demonstrated courage in the face of adversity. There is truly power in their faith. The similarities that I see in these women with me is that they often faced adversity alone while God was with them through it all.

Womanism Alice Walker

07/11/2022

Week Five – How can you apply what you have learned from these historical/biblical women and womanist theology in the past five weeks? Home, community, church, local neighborhood...etc?

All of the women included in the project were very focused on justice for the greater good and remained on their mission regardless of naysayers, oppressors, and adversaries. My journey has been like their journey and my hope remains in the Word of God that gives me strength. I press on in my community, church and neighborhood with the mission given to me by God. My supporting scripture is as follows:

because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

Humbly Submitted.

Electronic Journal P19

Participant 19

Rev. Jones' Doctoral Project

June 13, 2022

Writing prompt-How did it feel learning about Rizpah?

Although I knew the story of Rizpah and some of her challenges, (a victim of rape, being considered a concubine), what stood out to me was her determination to do for her sons in death what she could not do for them in life. Here we have a grieving mother taking up a silent vigil over her sons. This resonates with me deeply. As a mother of an African American son, I am daily reminded that I cannot protect my son from outside forces that seek to destroy him. Sadly, I feel more at ease thinking about my son a firefighter running into a burning building than I do about him looking down the barrel of a gun held by a scared and racist police officer.

I am reminded of Mamie Till's prophetic activism when she insisted that the casket containing his body be left open so the world could see what they did to her boy. I am reminded of Sean Bell's mother's prophetic activism as she sat outside the precinct day after day regardless of the weather conditions seeking justice for Sean and assuring that the police and community would not forget what the police did to her son. My heart aches remembering Rizpah's story and all of the mothers who wish they could have

protected their children from cruelty and doing what any mother would do. We eulogize our children with our presence and our tears.

I am also reminded that I don't need to wait (God forbid) for something to happen to my child. Mothers need mothers. Particularly African American mothers to sit together, cry together, pray together, march together, protest together, to make sure like Rizzpah that their sons' memories are protected. It also reminds me of the desperate need to be proactive rather than reactive. It reminds me that we need to be vigilant in fighting for police accountability and protesting the senseless deaths of Black and brown men and women disproportionately killed by police officers. Surviving mothers have become unlikely activists who share the impact of heartbreak who need other mothers to stand with and support them. I pray I can become one of them.

6/20/22-Ida B. Wells Barnett

What made this historical woman special, in my opinion?

She is special in my opinion because she didn't use the excuses that many of us (myself included) use. Despite having the responsibility of caring for her siblings, juggling being a wife and mother, Ida did not allow any of these obligations to deter her from her activism. I marvel at her conviction and determination to shine lights on inequalities. I always knew, but I was reminded from Ida's story that there has to be a breaking point, a point when we can no longer sit on the sidelines and watch others work or even worse do nothing in the face of evil. Ida's breaking point was the lynching of her friends. Each time I hear the story of a remarkable woman, whether a biblical character or woman in history, I feel a renewed determination to get to work to right some wrongs. Our voting rights are being suppressed. Women are losing the right to make their own medical decisions and are being blocked access to health care. This issue is particularly alarming for African American women who will be disproportionately affected. I see these changes as just the tip of the iceberg, only the beginning of more rights being taken away. And just as Ida used her God given gift of writing, I too am called to use all of my gifts (my voice, my hands, and my feet) to stand up against those who are turning the clock back to an extremely dangerous time in history and are seeking to strip the rights away from women and African Americans. When I was growing up, being Black and a woman was called a double whammy. My rights, my daughter's rights, my granddaughter's rights are being stripped. God, give me the wisdom, fortitude, and dedication to do all that you have called and gifted me to be.

6/27/22-- Mamie Till Mobley

How did it feel to share your journey with other Black Women this week? Explain in detail. Please add anything you would like the researcher to know.

Sharing this week was difficult. The topic was difficult, but it was also difficult to express how I was feeling. Emmett Till's story conjured up many images and feelings that I would have preferred not to see or think about. Additionally, there were times that I wanted to leave the session, not because of the topic, but because of frustration. I believe in the power of prayer. I serve a God of hope; however, as Black women, we have to do more than pray. Once we finish praying, it is time to get to work. We need to mobilize

our friends and family near and far to vote. We need to educate ourselves about our options. We need to reach out to advocacy groups to see how we can help. I believe in prayer. I believe in praying without ceasing; however, God has given us wisdom, and discernment. And the time is now for more than thoughts and prayers. I am frustrated and extremely sad. I am sad that the pain and tragedy never seems to end. I am sad that I and so many others are not equipped to affect change. I am praying, but what I am praying for is for God to open up my heart, mind, and spirit to do “what thus says the Lord.” In prayer, God speaks, and I/we must move.

7/5/22- The Woman with the Issue of Blood

What similarities do you see between yourself and any of the historical/biblical women? Explain.

I see myself in all of the women we learned about and discussed. I have been like the woman with the issue of blood. I have been desperate for a healing. Although I could not tangibly touch Jesus, I reached out to Him in prayer with faith and He healed me. Rizpah and Mamie Till resonate deeply with me. As a Black woman with a son, I pray daily for my son’s safety. I identify with their feelings of helplessness at not being able to protect my son from the very people who took a vow to protect him. I can’t imagine their pain and pray I don’t live to feel it. I am blessed to have my son and daughter and I know that this project is igniting a fire inside of me to move, to act, to be a force against white supremacy. Black women have fought back throughout history abhorrent efforts at dehumanization of their children. It is easy to feel defeated, but I want to join the legacy of Black mothers who have the resiliency to push for change, no matter what the decision is at the end of the trial of these murderers who take the life of our children without remorse and without giving it a second thought.

7/11/22

How can you apply what you have learned from these historical/biblical women and womanist theology in the past five weeks? Home, community, church, local neighborhood...etc.?

As I have been saying, the time is now for me to act/move to effect change. I know that I am a participant in a doctoral project, but I also know that God does not make mistakes. I believe as Black women who have come together to discuss, share, encourage and support one another that the road does not have to end on July 18th. If we truly want to be prophetic activists, my prayer is that we can remain connected and work towards making changes in our communities, neighborhoods, and country. Covid-19 has taught me that no matter where we live, we can remain connected. As Black women, we have unique issues (race, gender, and class) that cannot be addressed by feminist theology. Womanist theology makes it clear that we have distinctive concerns that unite us. If this is the end for this group of women, I know there is another group of women that I can join to put hands and feet to my prayers to do the work of the Lord. I know the Lord requires me “to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with my God” (Micah 6:8). And I need my sisters to walk with me.

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